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OLD STYLES'S.

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BY

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LONDON:
BOSWORTH & HARRISON, 215 REGENT STREET.

MDCCLXIX.

249. x. 606.



LONDON:
Printed by G. BARCLAY, Castle St. Leicester Sq.

TO

CHARLES DICKENS, Esq.

THIS LITTLE WORK

Is Dedicated,

WITH THE REGARD AND GRATITUDE

OF

THE AUTHOR.

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OLD STYLES'S.

It wasn't at all jolly at home (said Master Balfour, with a sigh) after mamma died. That occurred when I was about four. Somehow, my governor and I didn't pull together at all. Before—before the time I spoke of—I take it we had rubbed on pretty well; for I don't remember any rows, and can hardly call to mind having even seen him—except once—though of course I *had*, for my nursery was next to the room he made his study.

Mamma I never forgot. I have seen her hundreds of times, since she died—in dreams—and *once besides* at Sienna. It's true. I'll tell you presently. But I must describe her a little first.

Mamma was always in white, and had light chestnut hair, that glistened in the sun, and might have trailed on the ground as she walked. One day, while laughing and playing with me, she untied a blue fillet that went round her head, and regularly wrapped me up in a soft, scented cloud of curls. I was screaming

with delight at mamma's bright idea, when the door dashed open, and in stalked the governor.

"Why—where *is* he—the screeching monkey?" he asked, glaring round the room in astonishment.

"Here, Philip," said mamma, with her pretty laugh; and she allowed my little round face to make a golden window in her hair.

Papa showed his great white teeth (he never smiled in any other fashion), and strode away.

I never remember him distinctly again, until after that beautiful hair was dressed for its last pillow, and a white figure was lying in St. Stephen's aisle, with, over it, the effigy of a person making believe to cry, and this written:—

M. S. CONJUGIS DILECTISSIMÆ PERPETUUM AMORIS ET DESIDERII MONUMENTUM MARITUS HEU! SUPERSTES. P. C.
--

You want to know how I saw her at Sienna. It was soon after I joined the "Armadillo," then cruising in the Mediterranean. We had come to some grief or other, in one of the tempests that simpering sea tosses you up in ten minutes, and were ordered to Civita Vecchia to refit. As it was found that this would take four days, the captain kindly gave permission for me

and two other fellows, under the charge of an old quarter-master, to make the tour of North and Central Italy, on the sole condition of our reporting ourselves on board the fourth day from thence.

Thereupon we dashed at Rome; engaged a first-rate guide, paying him five guineas, on the express understanding that, as our time was limited, he should contrive to show us everything worth seeing within the space of two hours, leaving time for grub; and then took counsel as to our further course.

One voted for Florence, because he had a pretty cousin of that name; another proposed Milan. Pisa was ultimately resolved upon. Hey for the Leaning Tower! and on we pushed, as though there were fear of its toppling over before we could arrive. It wouldn't do, however. We could only make Sienna, and into that rum old settlement we toiled, having just time left to toddle through it and return.

Passing a large, ugly, old house, we saw a stream of people going in and out. Of course we followed. It was a gallery of paintings, now for the first time opened to the public. We lounged about—tired, confounded, and dizzy—hardly conscious of what we saw. I was gazing listlessly at one of the pictures when I suddenly turned sick and faint, and sank on my knees. A lot of people came round me; and there was I—an officer in her Majesty's service—kneeling, crying, and pointing up at the picture, calling out frantically:—

"Come down, mamma! Oh, come down! come down!"

They thought I was mad. Perhaps I was. I only know that there was a rank of angels surrounding a still more glorious figure, that one of these had turned and smiled upon me, and that it was *my mother!*

Twice, since, I have visited Sienna, and sought out that same picture. There it is: there are all the beautiful angels, but no face among them in the least resembles *hers*; and the figure I fancied must be mamma's never turned again.

Why do you smile, Miss May? Do you think I'm romancing? It's not so strange. If anybody means to tell me there are no ghosts now-a-days, *I* say there are; for, without telling any fib, I slept in a haunted room a few nights ago, and precious odd I felt. Now, so I tell you.

How did I feel? Why, just as you would, if a fellow in great creaky boots walked up and down your room all night, and every time he passed the fire-place stopped to pitch on a lot of coals. It's true, upon my honour. It happened at B——, at the Hollo, though! I was advised not to mention the name of the hotel, for fear the landlord, who is rather a perky party, should be down upon me for damages. But I was put into a very comfortable room on the third floor, and there, from eleven o'clock till four, when I was tired out and went to sleep, the sounds I told you of continued.

Once, too, I felt as if something very soft and heavy, like nineteen feather-beds, was laid gently upon me, and lifted off again. "Nightmare!" . . . Precious like it! Why should two other fellows—*three*, with a lady—hear the same things in that same room? *Did* they? Rather.

The night after my adventure my big cousin George, who was in the Crimea, had the same room given him. I was away, and had not seen him; so, of course, he could know nothing of what had happened to *me*. The next day we met, and the first thing George said was:—

"Hollo, old fellow! what sort of games are these in No. —? I think the devil is in that room."

And he told me exactly what I have told *you*.

But that's not all about it. A day or two after, I happened to call upon my cousin, Mrs. Lennox. As I went in, she was talking to a visitor about something that had occurred to an ancient pal of hers, Miss B. Hearing the name of the — hotel, I pricked up my ears; and—to cut it short—she told me that Miss B., when occupying No. —, some three or four months before, had heard and felt the same things.

No wonders now-a-days! Bosh! Don't you know what happened three years ago, about the wreck of the "Ercolano," when Sir Robert Peel had such a squeak for it? Well, a collision, you remember, took place on the night of the 25th of April, 1854, on the coast between Antibes and Nice—the "Ercolano" running her bows

slap into the quarter of the "Sicilia." Among the passengers lost were the wife and daughter of a counsellor of the Cour Impériale of Dijon. The younger lady, before embarking, had experienced a strong sense of some impending misfortune, and tried hard, it was said, to get the voyage postponed.

At the moment of the collision, a few minutes before midnight, the counsellor at Dijon had a frightful dream, in which he distinctly witnessed the accident, and all its details, even to the spectacle of his wife and child struggling in the waves, surrounded by the other poor people the "Sicilia" could not save.

I wasn't born on All-hallows Eve; but, nevertheless, somehow I've had odd things happening to me and around me all my life. They used to frighten me at first; but I luckily made acquaintance with a fellow who had been half-educated in Germany, and studied metaphysics and general ghostology under the best professors; and in five minutes Bobby Sharpe put me up to the whole thing.

Here's his explanation in my pocket-book. I popped it down from his own lips at the time, and I never again felt the least bit alarmed at anything they call "unaccountable." I wonder whether Mrs. Catherine Crowe is aware that ghosts are only the impulsive action of the lining of one's stomach? It's a fact, sir. When people are pulling long faces, squinting over their shoulders, snuffing candles, and poking fires, I simply whisper to myself, "Stomach, sir; all stomach. Impulsive action."

(By the by, what lots of "sensible phenomena" ought to be visible on board a Margate steamer with a chopping sea!) But here is Bob on spectres. Hem!

"In certain moods, such as that passive state known as intense cogitation, the inevitable diminution of activity in those senses which constitute general outward consciousness tends to concentrate in the interior of the body the subtle essences existent there, in a manner calculated to augment its impulsive action."

(It's all very well to say that you've seen the same results produced by the exhibition of rhubarb-magnesia! That has nothing to do with it.)

"So far, then, all is clear. Now, if in these peculiar concentrations of the inner life, the external senses preserve any reasonable activity, the perceptions become complicated and unsure. Instead of positive reflections, you have dreams and phantasms—somnambulic visions, and, in fact, the whole extensive family of the indescribabilities—offspring (and very troublesome ones) of the jarring action of one's inner principle, with the inharmonious and deceptive influences therewith connected."

That's the statement, sir; and Bob always added, that if it were practicable to stew down fifty volumes of psychology into a quarter of a page, he could not possibly present the entire subject in a clearer and more condensed form.

Very easy to say you're not afraid! You'd like to see the ghost that would startle *you*! *Would you?* I

know a fellow who was always bragging the same thing; vowing that his curiosity would overcome his fear; and, in short, that the jolliest thing in *this* world would be to have some talk with the other. He was always speaking of an ancestor of his--a wicked woman, who died at a court-ball in the reign of George the Second. She had been lovely in her young and innocent days; and the chap I speak of had fallen in love with her picture as a young shepherdess. He swore he would give anything he possessed to see her, old or young. Now, see what happened. He had the candour to tell us all about it.

One night, he was sitting in his father's library, copying some rather dry family documents, the nature of which, however, attracted his thoughts somewhat more than usual towards his beloved great-great-grand-mother. He worked on as busily as he could, but, in a short time, became conscious of queer things happening in the room. His candles (he had four) would not burn harmoniously together; one or another always went out, till Charley Savage got tired of lighting the defaulting dips, and went on with three. When he laid down his pen on one side, he always found it on the other. He was perfectly positive that the bust of his great-uncle, Sir Tubal Savage, which usually fronted his chair, had turned its face towards the door, as though in earnest expectation. But what was strangest of all, the minute-hand of the clock went suddenly round to the other side of the dial; and, as though not satisfied with deserting

his own post, seduced his brother of the hour from his allegiance, and conducted him summarily to the hour of twelve.

Charley confessed that he was not a little astonished at these occurrences; but his surprise was speedily merged into a consciousness of something impending, of which they were but the forerunners. A sort of anxiety took possession of him. He sat back in his chair, and listened. Presently, he heard a slow, very slow step approaching, accompanied by a sound between a rustle and a whistle, like a lady's silk dress brushing the walls of a narrow passage; the door swung open, and in walked a tall woman, magnificently attired, holding her train over one braceletted arm, and carrying in the other hand a fan. A rich white veil was over her head.

Charley felt a sort of relief at the sight of something so material, not to say majestic, and rose politely to receive his visitor. But as she came nearer, the feeling changed to one of the intensest horror and fear, for he saw that she was not of earth. His reckless wish was accomplished, and he stood face to face with one departed. The veil had fallen back from her face, and exhibited a countenance upon which the damps of the grave had already exercised their disfiguring and destroying power. The eyes of the beauty were gone; the great yellow teeth, left uncovered by the shrunken lips, grinned horribly, as though set in agony; the entire skull was plainly visible through the tight-drawn skin, but in one

hollow cheek some faded rouge and a patch could yet be seen.

Altogether, Savage confessed that the sight chilled his blood; but the figure came straight upon him, and in doing so aroused him to a sort of desperation. He caught up two of the candles, and waved them violently before him, adjuring the spectre to keep off, as she valued her bones, or whatever corporal fragments she retained. But it was no use. On she came, with a sidelong coquettish movement of the head, inexpressibly fearful; and Savage, backing out of her reach, knocked his head against the wall, and woke. His pulse was going like a mill-race, and he was in a perfect bath of fear. It was half an hour before he regained his composure, and he never desired to see his shepherdess again.

Very well. I know it was a dream. But how do you know you would have more pluck, awake?

Better go back to my own history! Very good, Miss May; all right. Only I thought you'd like to have the receipt for sleeping in comfort in the hauntedest house, and perhaps be able to do without that Albert light, without which, you know very well, you would not close an eye. Think, in future, of the coats of your stomach, and Bobby Sharpe.

I missed mamma terribly. I think I moped and got ill; for I scarcely recollect anything at that time, until one morning, when my nurse, Martha Bundle by name,

gave me two kisses and a little pair of trowsers, and told me I was now six years old, and a man. That pleased me, and presently set me thinking as I had never done before. I believed in my Bundle as implicitly as a negro in his fetiche—considered that I had really arrived at a rather stunted maturity, and began to wonder that papa, who was a man too, didn't cultivate my society. He spent nearly the whole of his time in his study, poring over books and arithmetical tables.

My nursery was a passage-room; but, often as the governor came through, he rarely noticed me, and indeed was accustomed to stride past without even turning his head. Cast entirely upon Bundle, I became Bundle's boy—more Bundle than Balfour—enthusiastically embracing all that lady's doctrines, and boldly echoing every sentiment she uttered, which were not a few. Bundle had a susceptible heart, and 'a haunted brain: she was, moreover, the victim of an "unhappy attachment," which preyed upon her mind, but which, from the region to which, in speaking of it, she usually applied her hand, I long imagined to be a stitch in the side.

She drank, I may say, *hogsheads* of tea. I declare I never did see such a girl for tea! She seemed to be of opinion with Guy Fawkes, that "gunpowder" was a radical cure for all defects in the constitution; and, especially when suffering under a paroxysm of the unhappy attachment, her existence was one uninterrupted swizzle.

Dingy-looking letters, folded very square, the ad-

hesive envelope bearing no other device than that of a dirty thumb, were delivered at long intervals to Bundle by the postman. With the contents of these she mostly favoured me, but I understood little of their meaning, and only gathered from Bundle's sobs and broken comments that certain "goings-on" of the writer occasioned her considerable anxiety. Apparently this was not ill-founded; for, one day, on the receipt of a letter dated "Justitia," poor Bundle went into violent hysterics, and was only restored to an artificial serenity after the administration of at least a gallon of the most powerful hyson.

The note in question contained a pathetic farewell, adding that the writer, whose name appeared to be Bill Marjoram, expected to form part of an expedition undertaken by a chosen band of three hundred adventurers, with the entire concurrence (not to use a stronger term) of the government of the country, and directed to a very beautiful but distant island in the Pacific.

Mr. Marjoram, who seemed to be of a rather sentimental turn, concluded by drawing a hasty parallel between his own projected pilgrimage and that of Childe Harold, playfully expressing a hope that his bark might rival the Childe's in speed—the latter, as you are aware, Miss May, going thirty-eight knots an hour. That, I believe, is the usual rate of a falcon's flight; and you will remember the Childe distinctly avers that the bark could keep up with—if not beat—the bird.

It was a long time before my poor nurse entirely recovered this terrible shock. Her life was divided between tears and tea. I had some faint idea that she was dying of a broken heart; but this was, no doubt, prompted rather by her allusions to her failing health than my own unaided observation. She took a fancy for walking in the churchyard; and especially frequented the neighbourhood of inscriptions illustrative of the precarious tenure of human existence.

There was one cheerful corner, where, under a couple of sombre yews, we passed many an hour in the luxury of low "sperrits." I remember a half-sunken, wooden memorial, close by, which informed us that Ephraim Lufkin of this parish, tanner, had deceased, *ætat.* twenty-seven (precisely Bundle's years), and altogether unexpectedly; for, said the epitaph,

" Grim Death took me without any warning ;
I was well at night, and dead at half-past nine o'clock the
next morning."

I have read grander compositions since, and looked at some too fine to read; but none impressed me so much as, in its simplicity and stern preciseness, did this, upon the poor tanner.

Bundle had a friend. She was almost our only visitor, and used to appear mysteriously about six o'clock, with a tea-cake wrapped up in her pocket-handkerchief, and, for the first half hour, always carried on the con-

versation in a whisper; as though her mistress, who lived about two miles off, could hear all she said. She was called Gretwood (Gertrude) Cornish; and she toadied Bundle in the most absurd manner.

"Well, my dear!" would Gretwood begin, in a dismal tone, "and how is your poor sperrits, this evening? You bears up, *don't* you?"

"I don't know how I does it, then," Bundle would tartly reply. "It's well for them as has never known troubles to talk of bearing up. But life don't last, and tea's drawn. Only don't you offer me no cake."

"I won't, I won't, child," said the discreet Gretwood, who knew she had only to toast, butter, and leave it to its fate. The rest—as Hamlet remarks—was silence; *i.e.* munching.

After a pause,—

"Tea-cakes," Bundle would say, abstractedly, "is not what they was in this village, since Marks" (the baker) "married. His wife's a close one! I always fancy they're made of seconds flour."

"*This* I'll answer for," rejoined the friend. "It's as good as ever I see."

"Is it?" said Bundle. "I don't know. Just give me a crumb. I'll taste it."

"Do. Coax yourself, child," said Gretwood, condolingly; "your stomach wants it."

"Stomach! Stuff! It's nerves. I was always a

poor, fragile thing; and now I'm sinking gradual away.

' Like to a lily cropt in my bloom,
My morning sun will set before 'tis noon, ' "

said Bundle, altering the tense of one of her favourite epitaphs to suit her case.

" Oh, please, now, don't," said the friend, whimpering. " Do you know, my dear, when you do talk so beautiful, I always think—thinks I——"

" What, child?"

" That something's a-calling you."

" Eh! Calling? Nonsense!" said Bundle, upon whose nerves this hint always acted healthfully. " What do you mean?"

" P'raps you're best away," would Gretwood continue, wiping away a supposed tear. " Life 's all such troubles and afflictions. Our best friends can't escape 'm; that's one comfort, isn't it? And then, it's such a pleasure to complain. It worrits others that's better off, and makes them pity, whether they likes it or no."

" Life's a duty," said Bundle, much revived. " Where's the caddy? Just another little dust, for the last cup; and, Master Philip, *you* go to bed."

This order was preliminary to a lengthened confidential discussion, in which "master" and his peculiar ways were, no doubt, freely handled. After which a loud kiss and a sniff proclaimed the parting of the

gossips, and nurse withdrew to her couch to dream of her absent hero.

However it might be with Bundle, *I* was never in the least afraid of the governor. On the contrary, I had a queer fancy that he was rather afraid of *me*—was shy, in fact, and required encouragement. I resolved, in my childish way, to break the ice ; and accordingly received him, on his very next appearance, with a patronising nod and smile. The governor stopped short in his progress through the room, winking both eyes, as if he didn't quite believe their report ; and strode out quicker than usual. *That* did not do.

I next tried him with a box of soldiers, putting it sily among the big books on his table, with the lid temptingly open. As nothing came of this filial sacrifice, I popped in, during his absence, to ascertain its fate. My ungrateful sire had pitched it into his waste-paper basket ! It was clear our pursuits and interests were altogether dissimilar, and as no advances on my part seemed likely to bring about a better understanding, I abandoned the contest, and again fell back on my Bundle.

We lived in a large old house, called the Mansion, and reputed (I believe, justly) to have been, at one time, tenanted by the bloody Chancellor Jeffreys, at that period of the learned lord's career when he first experienced the sensation he had inflicted upon so many—that of being “wanted,” for purposes scarcely consistent

with one's personal comfort. There was his secret chamber, now a lumber-room, and perhaps still only fulfilling its original duty. There were two back-stair-cases, leading to nothing particular; a range of garrets to which no known access existed; and a singular subterranean apartment under the beer-cellar. This last was of a most sepulchral aspect, and, when first discovered, contained the remains—don't start, Miss May—of a mangle, with which, it must be presumed, the judge proposed to keep his cramped muscles in order, during any lengthened period of concealment.

The whole house was full of odd noises, cracks, thumps, rumbles, &c., but these were chiefly heard in the vicinity of a large dismal room on the ground-floor, known as the state-chamber, in which no one was ever known to sleep *twice*! The servants shot past this room after dusk, as though it were the den of a hungry bear, and didn't linger, even in the day. A light had been seen there at night, and this circumstance, often and positively alleged, at last aroused the attention even of my studious governor. It proved to be a reality—no delusion—and a curious thing enough.

The servants long knew it by the name of the Judge's Lamp.

My father gave directions that he should be informed, at any moment, of its reappearance, and the polite Chancellor delayed his visit no longer than the following night. The governor descended to the spot, and there

beheld a small, steady patch of greenish light, sometimes dwelling on the coverlet of the bed, sometimes on the curtain, sometimes on the pillow. At times, it went dodging about the room like a large bright moth; and Bundle could not help laughing heartily as she described my dear staid governor, in his nightcap and slippers, skipping about the apartment in hot pursuit, to the last degree interested in a matter which, for once, baffled his penetration.

The next day he wrote to a scientific friend of his in London, describing minutely what had happened. Down to the mansion came Mr. K——, and thither came the light, as though expressly to meet him. He, papa, and another gentleman, then saw it together. There was a long and learned discussion concerning “angles of incidence,” “direction of emanation,” “luminosity,” “phosphorescence,” &c. &c.; but Mr. K—— departed the next morning, no wiser and considerably less cocky, than he came.*

Then the rats—oh, crikey!—the rats! In the long drawing-room—an apartment with about nineteen windows (I never counted them exactly)—the noise they made was inconceivable.

From the perpetual knockings, sawings, and general

* A similar circumstance occurred, some years since, at Wormeley Grange, near Leominster. The most careful and curious examination, conducted by a gentleman who, as it happened, had made the laws of light his peculiar study, failed to detect the origin of the luminous appearance. *

carpentry-work, you might, if you shut your eyes, imagine yourself in the yard of a joiner doing brisk business. These animals used to work by rule. I am certain they had their laws and regulations, supervisors, commissioners, and all the rest of it. *This*, now, is what used to happen, and I got as familiar with the scene passing behind the wainscot as though I could see it.

In the midst of the confusion and turmoil there would suddenly be heard a loud thump. This announced the arrival of a great lord rat, who came to see how the works were progressing. Dead silence of respect—perhaps anxiety. Murmur of applause—the lord rat dignified, yet bland. Thump—signal for every one to repair to his particular post, occasioning a tremendous general scramble from one end to the other. Silence again. Low squeaking murmurs, one voice predominating; clearly the lord rat visiting the departments, expressing dissatisfaction, receiving apologies, &c. Now and then occurred a sudden alarm, struggle, and outcry—the lord rat had pounced upon a defaulter. Distant solitary squeak—the lord rat has completed his rounds, and is expressing his general sentiments. Now always followed a thundering rush from end to end of the room, thrice repeated. What could these mean but races in honour of the lord rat? This over, business and conversation recommenced as usual.

Living among startling associations, and not having

learned, at that time, from Bobby Sharpe, that all our domestic disturbances—apart from the rats—were due to the impulsive action of the coats of my stomach, of course I grew up rather a nervous chap, holding the old lamp-carrying judge in tremendous respect, and dividing my time between playing at Robinson Crusoe in our wilderness of a garden, and spelling out tales of horror to Bundle in the nursery.

We had reached the middle of an exciting narrative, which had already occupied us for some days. It referred to a gentleman who had disappeared from human observation for a space of several weeks, at the expiration of which he returned, neatly packed in a hamper and addressed to his housekeeper. The hamper was marked, "Game,"—in rude testimony, it may be, to the pluck with which the poor gentleman—whose name was "Osbert St. George"—had defended himself against his assailants, the condition of his hands showing that he had fought in a manner worthy of his distinguished name.

We had, as I was saying, got half way through this veracious history, when an extraordinary event interrupted the tranquil course of our existence. My father himself disappeared! It's a fact! He walked through the nursery as usual after breakfast—not *quite* as usual, for I remember that he turned and smiled on me—and went out, as we supposed, for his accustomed short stroll; but he didn't come back.

Now, my governor was so odd and reserved, that we should not have been much surprised at his leaving home without previous warning, if he had gone in the ordinary way. But if a party goes away for a fortnight he doesn't usually forget a change of linen. It is possible he may charge himself with a razor, or pop a nightcap—if he has the bad taste to wear one—into his pocket. Above all, Miss May, he does not neglect his tin: whereas my father took nothing but his everyday hat. He left his watch on the chair, his money scattered on the table, everything as though it were his purpose to return in ten minutes—perhaps it was.

I remember being greatly awe-struck when, a week after his departure, I followed Martha Bundle, a neighbouring gentleman, who was a magistrate, and the sexton, who was a constable, round my father's room. There was so much of life in the traces of his careless, studious habits, that it seemed as though he must be still at hand, unseen.

After much consultation, the magistrate, Mr. Pinkerton, decided that, having regard to my father's peculiar ways, it would be desirable to permit a few more days to elapse before instituting inquiry. Any post might bring some communication from him, while, supposing him in safety, nothing would be more likely to irritate and annoy him than an over-officious scrutiny into his proceedings. Everything, therefore, was left untouched; the magistrate and his satellite withdrew, and Bundle

despatched an express urchin for Gretwood, entreating her to come to tea, and afterwards join in relieving their mutual sperrits with a comfortable cry.

The succeeding week was one of terrible anxiety and a considerable amount of tea. Bundle's sperrits sunk lower and lower. She had frightful dreams, in which she beheld her master engaged in mortal combat with men of fearful aspect, or lying stretched on his back with his skull fractured, and his ransacked pocket-book on the ground beside him. She had made up her mind that he had fallen a victim to such an outrage, and went to bed every night in the full expectation that his ghost would attend and mention it.

One circumstance did occur which, not without reason, tended to confirm her belief. My father's hat was brought to the house by one of the village people, who had picked it up in a field under a hedge which skirted the high road. The hat was both torn and battered, but no bloodstains were perceptible. The magistrate, however, on learning this discovery, thought it better no longer to delay investigation, and it was finally resolved that, should the next morning's post bring no tidings of or from the missing man, active steps should be taken to ascertain the truth.

That evening, Gretwood came to tea; and I am afraid I should be wholly discredited, were I to state the precise number of times the teapot was replenished, before those two women tacitly admitted they could

swallow no more; and Gretwood began to look about for her things, preparatory to a "trot" home.

I had been sent to bed long before the close of this protracted carouse; the last (though they didn't know it) these faithful allies were to enjoy in that pleasant room. My bed was in a sort of alcove, divided from the rest of the apartment by a heavy curtain, at such a distance from the bed that I could not undraw it without getting regularly out. This curtain kept me in comparative darkness, while at the same time I could hear the greater part of the conversation, and always the soothing mumble of the gossips' tongues.

There was a rustling of dresses, and I knew by the choky sound of Gretwood's voice that she was tying her bonnet-strings, and that she was, moreover, a little nervous about walking home in the dark. Bundle comforted her as well as she could, promising to put the light in the window, that she might see its reassuring glimmer as she went her lonely way. A few sniffs, the usual kiss, and the friends tore themselves apart; Bundle reminding the other that she had engaged to "pop" out the next evening (if missis were as charming as usual), in order to talk about the mourning my nurse foresaw would be necessary; and Gretwood stipulating that, should the body be found during the morning, a special messenger should apprise her of the fact.

Gretwood's fingers were toying with the handle of the door, when a startled "*Hus-s-sh!*" from Bundle aroused my attention.

"Goods be gracious!" said the voice of Gretwood;
"whatever is the matter?"

"Matter! My! What a turn it give me!" said Bundle; a chair creaking as she sank upon it.

"Turn, child! Who is it? What is it?—Marjoram?"

"Bother Marjoram!" retorted Bundle, forgetting her love in her terror. "I—I—it's all fancy, you know; but I heard—oh, dear! *master's sneeze!*"

"Where? where?"

"In his own room."

"There's no entrance, child, but through the nursery!"

"Not for no *man*," said Bundle, in a hollow tone.
"Ghosts gets anywheres."

"Cats sneezes," suggested Gretwood, with tremulous brevity.

"They don't go '*cht-chēeo*,'" said Bundle, in equally trembling accents. "I should know master's sneeze in nine hundred!"

"*Cht-che-e-eo!*"

Never shall I forget Bundle's shriek, as an unmistakable sneeze resounded from my father's room. Both women united in a second scream as the door opened, and a heavy step announced to me that somebody had entered the nursery. My first impulse was to duck under the clothes; but curiosity got the better, and I remember distinctly what followed, even to a word. Yes, Miss May, many a scene and word, infinitely better

worth, have passed from my childish recollection for ever and a day, but this got caught, I suppose, on some odd hook, and has hung there ever since. I hear the same voices now.

First, my governor's.

"What is the meaning of this uproar, woman?"

"Oh, don't, sir! don't!" said Gretwood; "she's just a-coming to."

"To! The timorous idiot!"

Bundle shrieked.

"See there!" said Gretwood: "you've set her off again. She's such a sperrit! You don't mean she's a idiot, now, do you, sir?" (Half aside) "Say you was joking, please."

"What do you mean? Who are you? What are you doing here?" vociferated the governor.

But the undaunted Gretwood stuck to her friend and patron.

"Oh, sir, how can you? Where's her salts? It's my belief you gentlemen thinks all women's nerves is steel."

A shriek from Bundle, in corroboration.

"Have done with this foolery!" said my father; "and ——"

Gretwood cut him short.

"Oh, go on, go on. I'd just demean myself a little more; I would, sir, if I was you. . . . There, blow your nose" (this to Bundle), "you sufferin' flower. Well, may

I never! actually laughing and sitting down, as if we was at a play! Oh, sir, I wonder that chair don't let you down! There, there, my dear. Why, 'tis your master himself! You knows him now, don't you?"

"I give you five minutes to regain your reason, woman," said my father, as I heard him rise and re-enter his room, apparently half angry, half amazed, at the disturbance he had caused.

"Oh, my dear, it's very awful!" began Bundle, with an exhausted sigh.

"Indeed, my dear, it *is* trying," said her friend. "Gracious knows, you've had a deal to bear. But it's one comfort, your constitution's yielding. When you're gone, he'll find out——"

"I—I'm better," said Bundle, hastily. "It's like a hideous dream."

So the conversation ended; but, as I sank to sleep, I could not help wondering, if my governor's safe return were a hideous dream, how she would have described the realisation of her own dreams.

From and after the following morning, Bundle's spirits were more depressed than ever they had been during my father's absence. She had apparently had an interview with him after the departure of Gretwood; but she never told me what had passed; and all that I ever learned on the subject was gathered from Bundle's habitual soliloquies, as she went about her work.

"In at the winder . . . Well—if ever! Sudden

resolution Cuss such resolutions! (Lord, forgive me!) Well, it can't come to no good! Such a angel, too! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Him as cared for nothing but doing his figures! And only to think—now—raily!”

Which fragments offered little for my reason to grapple with, beyond the fact that my respected sire had taken the fancy to effect a burglarious entrance into his own house.

My governor remained for some days secluded in his room. Then he went away again; not, however, giving us the slip as before. Bundle, I am sure, knew all about it; and whether it was a torment to her to keep a secret—as it is to some women—or for what other reason, I cannot say; but her state of mind was most alarming. The tea-kettle hissed and sputtered the whole day long. Bundle had alternate paroxysms of weeping and sweeping. She scrubbed and dusted like a maniac. Nothing that broom or napkin could command escaped her fury. The room looked like a new pin. At last, she broke a small mirror; and, as if this were the climax of her grief, she quietly laid down the duster, and, seating herself on the floor, burst into a wild lament.

About four o'clock Gretwood stole in, exchanged a whisper and a hug with Bundle, muttered that it was more than art (meaning nature) could bear, and as quickly withdrew. She, too, had learned the secret.

At five, Bundle took me by the hand, conducted me into the alcove, and solemnly dressed me; sticking a little nosegay into my buttonhole, as though she were decking a sacrifice. This done, she adorned herself with equal care, and down we sat to tea.

I decline, as heretofore, to mention the precise number of cups disposed of. Miss May would meet my assertion with an ironical smile, and dispute it on physiological grounds. We did finish, at last; and Bundle, with a sigh, admitted she must put away the things; and did so, leaving the kettle still simmering on the hob, with a faint idea that it might yet be needed "promiscuous," in the course of the day.

Then I sat on Bundle's knee (the good soul had been even more affectionate than usual all that morning), and listened lovingly to certain familiar melodies, with which she had been wont to soothe my pillow. I had one especial favourite. It bore upon the destinies of a young lady named "Pewterer," residing in a provincial town — But why not give the very words?

"In Colchester city lived Margaret Pewterer,
Her wit and her beauty did all folks extol.
Admired she lived, and had many a suitorer;
But *one* youth above all . . . tol lol de rol lol."

I was greatly impressed by the mystery of the concluding words. Every stanza broke off in the same singular manner. Had the bard (as sometimes happens) found the subject too much for him? Or was it a mere

poetic dodge, to excite awe and expectation? Poets are sly chaps, and if they can't catch you at once with their sentiment, will have at you with queer expressions, and even bad spelling, which they call their "license," though I'll be hanged if I know who issues it. ♣

Bundle's last "tol de rol lol" quavered into silence before she had quite finished; for the door opened, and in strode my governor. He was followed by a short, square-built woman, in a bonnet, with a thick veil.

Papa walked straight up to the table.

"Here, my boy," he said, "I've brought you a new mamma."

(I thought he said "bought" her, and meant it.)

The lady took off her bonnet, and gave, or rather flung it, to Bundle, with the air of a mistress. Except that she had great dark eyes, she reminded me of nothing so much as a savage little pug!

I was never accustomed to mince matters.

"*That* my mamma!" I said, with the utmost disdain. "Keep her yourself. I don't like her. I didn't want her. I won't have her."

My new mamma uttered exactly the sound I expected—a sort of suppressed bark. Papa, however, took me by the arm, and shook me—but not unkindly—as he said:—

"Come, come, sir, no more of this. Child as you are, I think you know better. This is a good lady, and a kind lady. She will teach you a great many

things; and, among others, to love her. I hope she will forgive your rudeness. She knows what little boys are. She has one of her own, who is very good and dutiful to her, and will make a capital playmate for—for my Philip—" said the governor, dropping his hand and his voice quite suddenly, as he looked down into my wistful eyes, as if he saw something there that stopped him.

I took hold of his coat—buttoned him, in fact. I was determined to expostulate the matter, before (as I thought) it was too late.

"Papa," I began earnestly, "where did you get her? In the village?"

"In London, Philip."

"Are there prettier ones at the same shop?"

"Shop, sir!"

"Nicer ones, papa. I don't like this. Change her, will you?"

Bundle hemmed, and pinched me; but it was of no use. My sentiments were declared.

"What charming candour! Dear, frank fellow!" exclaimed the new Mrs. Balfour: a smile that made me hate her crumpling up her face.

"A baby—a baby!" said my father, hastily. "A little training-work for you, my Grace; and this wild spray will bear some blossoms quickly. My fault that it has not already. Come, let me show you the rest of your domain."

He drew her arm within his, and they retired.

My Grace! Eugh!

Bundle had to attend the lady, whose own maid, it appeared, was to follow on the morrow in charge of Master Augustus, my destined playfellow; and I therefore saw no more of her that night, except when she ran in, about eight o'clock, to put me to bed. This she did with many kisses, and at least one tear, which, when it got cold, I detected on my face.

The next day arrived Mrs. Stracey, lady's-maid, bringing with her sundry large boxes and divers small ones; likewise a crafty-eyed, bloated-looking boy, about three years my senior.

Master Augustus was supposed to be at a boarding-school; but, considering that he boarded and lodged also nine months in the year at home, it is possible that the three weak old sisters, who presided over the sports of the establishment (tasks there were none), found Master Augustus a very profitable pupil. It was a mere "preparatory" school; and as Augustus was older by two years than any other boy, he enjoyed splendid opportunities of bullying. In these his soul delighted. He was the most cruel little beggar; and if I tell you he was a coward to the back-bone, you won't be surprised. He was, moreover, a fearful glutton; and such a jolly liar, that if ever his interest obliged him to speak the truth, it positively seemed to give him pain! He blushed and stammered, just as the naturally honest do when beguiled

into playing traitor to their consciences. I do believe he apologised to—something, for his occasional—though, to do him justice, rare—lapses from falsehood.

Bother him! I won't waste more words on him than I can help. Such excrescences on Nature's face have surely no business there at all; and since they do appear, it's plain her constitution's out of order, and wants clearing.

This charming youth was quartered in the nursery, where Bundle looked after us both, Mrs. Stracey devoting herself entirely to her mistress. Matters being thus settled, my governor returned, without ceremony, to his former habits, remaining the whole day, and sometimes half the night, immersed in study and calculation.

Meanwhile, a civil war was raging under his very nose.

On the second day after Master Augustus's arrival the simmering dislike that had at once commenced between us boiled over. We indulged in a little fight. Augustus, as I have mentioned, was three years older than me, or I don't think he would have been betrayed into the rashness I have mentioned. As it was, after one short round, in consequence of which one of Augustus's eyes went into decent mourning, his credit was saved by the interposition of Bundle, whom astonishment at the sudden strife had kept for a moment inactive.

The *casus belli* was simple. Augustus had caught a

mouse in one of those traps miscalled "humane;" and having read, or been told, how that certain cardinals, and other Romish dignitaries, were accustomed on sundry festivals to dip live rats into spirits of wine, and, setting fire to them, drive the shrieking lumps of scorched flesh among the legs of the laughing multitude (the only *auto-da-fé* these degenerate times allow); the aforesaid Augustus determined to imitate an example which had received such high and holy sanction, and had proceeded so far as to light his match, when I became aware of his intention.

Nothing irritated my playfellow so much as any interference with these little acts of benevolence. He shoved me angrily aside; and, on my returning the push, let fall his victim, and turned upon me. Hence the row.

Away darted Augustus to his mother. That lady was not one to remain passive under such circumstances. She had doubtless imagined that her darling was sturdy enough to defend his own unprepossessing countenance, but the blackening eye dispelled that fond illusion. And wasn't there a kick-up? Rushing into the nursery, she ordered me, on pain of severe punishment, to beg pardon of the injured youth, who sneaked in at his mother's heels. I refused. She raged. Bundle, however, stood by me, like the trump she was, and would not see me beaten. Thereupon the lady appealed to my father, who bowed out the complainants, locked

his door, and, being accosted through the keyhole, stopped it up!

My new mamma withdrew in silent fury, followed by her son, for whom she had a bed put up in her dressing-room, as though he were a thing too precious to be trusted out of her sight again. Then she arranged her plans. Of these, I comprehended nothing at the time. I knew them only from their uncomfortable results. But it seems that she had taken the deepest offence at my father's indifference, so openly displayed before Bundle, and resolved both to revenge herself and to assert her dominion.

I did not at that time know the secret of the influence that, in spite of appearances, she really exercised over my father. How should I know anything of their first meeting? Nobody had described to *me* how that the wealthy widow Langstone, driving in the outskirts of the village, had been run away with by her spirited ponies, goaded to madness by the busy whip of Master Augustus; how she was saved by a sauntering student, at the risk of his life and with the total destruction of his hat; how the grateful lady rewarded her preserver by permitting him to drive her home—falling desperately in love with him by the way—persuading the simple, unworldly philosopher, that he was a beggar, and would shortly need provision for himself and son—and finally yielding him her half-sought hand. If I could have understood all this, I might perhaps have guessed further, that, the

word once spoken, my father, strictly honest in all matters of business, had tried hard to make up, in gratitude and deference, what he wanted in love.

All I knew, at the time I speak of, was, that my governor was not passionately attached to his Grace; for that lady's first experiment was to shut herself up, as *he* had done, fully prepared to refuse him admission to her presence, had he required that boon. But he didn't.

In truth, the moment was most unfavourable for the accommodation of a love-quarrel. My governor, never demonstrative, accepted the "situation" resignedly enough, and enjoyed a period of unmixed content. He never quitted his desk, except to snatch a few hours' sleep, for three days; during which he revelled, I dare say, in a perfect luxury of cubes and logarithms. We had glimpses of him, as his scarcely-noticed meals went in and out, rubbing his hands and snapping his fingers in a sort of ecstasy. He seemed to be approaching the climax of whatever the object was to which his anxious calculations were devoted.

As for me, I was happy with my Bundle, and delighted at the absence of my "playfellow," whose departure we celebrated with a carouse of tea, that kept me awake till six in the morning.

Alas! the calm was brief. On the fourth morning, the enemy's patience being exhausted, my step-mother, supported by Augustus, with Mrs. Stracey.

in reserve, assaulted my father in his citadel. The governor entrenched himself in silence, but the moment was a cruel one, and the disturbance insupportable. He was, in reality, at the very crisis of his labours, when ten minutes' peace and quiet were unspeakably precious. The door was dashed open!

"Woman! woman!" cried my poor father, in tones of despair, "do you know what ruin you are working? What do you complain of? What do you need? Take my house, my land—take everything that calls me master; only peace—peace—peace! These fifteen feet of room, silence, and peace!"

My stepmother murmured a word in reply; after which, the party (excepting Mrs. Stracey) entered, and the door was shut.

A consultation succeeded, during which the lady's voice occasionally rose dominant and shrill—then a sound as of a pettish burst of tears, re-echoed by the amiable Augustus—after which, a gentle sort of making-up murmur, that boded the listeners no good—and, finally, re-enter my new mamma, radiant with victory, and evidently invested with irresponsible power.

She said not a word as she swept through, but she smiled on us—and I understood her.

Augustus was moved to a stronger demonstration. Sticking close to his mother's skirts, he ventured an impertinent grimace; which so provoked me, that I made a pounce at him like a terrier at a rat. He

was too quick for me, however, and vanished in a second.

My stepmother's first move was to get rid of Bundle, whom she detested. It wasn't so easy. My dear old nurse was fully up to snuff, and, seeing her game, determined to afford no shadow of a pretext for her dismissal. She didn't know the ingenuity of a bad nature. Mrs. Balfour, aware that everybody has a weak point, was not long in discovering poor Bundle's. Then she struck a deadly blow—my heart aches when I think of it:—

She confiscated our tea-caddy!

Bundle loved me better than any living thing, excepting Marjoram. She would, I am positive, have submitted without a word to any reasonable privation, for my sake; but *tea*—the very fountain and essence of her strength, her spirits, her very being! If Bundle had been up in Shakspeare (which she wasn't), she might have said with Shylock—who, if he got, as his judges threatened, more law than he desired, had precious little equity:

“ You take my life,
When you do take the (tea) whereby I live.”

Mrs. Balfour declared that tea was both unwholesome and expensive; that the quantity consumed in the nursery was something bordering on the preternatural; and that she would henceforth issue what was really

required, herself. This amount falling ridiculously short of Bundle's craving, and the article being at the time unusually dear, my poor nurse, in the first impulse of despair, gave warning!

No sooner done than repented of. Bundle, on a calm analysis of her feelings, discovered that it was easier to part with her teapot than her darling. She endeavoured to retract: but it was too late. In giving warning, she had not confined herself to the dry official announcement, but had unluckily favoured her mistress with a not inconsiderable fragment of her "mind." Whereupon a month's wages had been tendered to her, with a request that she would depart as soon as convenient, or sooner.

Fancy my grief and rage, when I could be made to understand that my nurse was really to be sent away. Bundle, however, being compelled to admit that it was inevitable, I resolved to accompany her, and forthwith proceeded to pack up some necessaries, taking care to include my trap-bat and a musical cart, in the event of our spirits needing any little stimulant by the way.

Bundle, I suppose, could not find it in her heart to interrupt my affectionate preparations, but they were shortly stopped by the entrance of Mrs. Balfour, followed by Stracey.

She pretended to be astonished at finding Bundle still there.

"You had better be quick with your boxes, Martha

Bundle. (I can't think what you can want with *two* trunks.) The coach passes, as you know, at three o'clock."

"Thank you all the same, 'm," replied Bundle, with much dignity. "It is not my present intentions, 'm, to leave to-night; leastways, I would say, the village."

"Whether you prefer sleeping at the ale-house, or going on, is of no consequence to anybody, that I know. But Mrs. Stracey will occupy this bed to-night, and she waits for your keys."

"Then Mrs. Stracey will p'raps sit down," said Bundle, with lofty, though I fear satirical, courtesy. "I'm not at leisior just at present."

"You impudent hussy!" exclaimed Mrs. Balfour, losing patience. "What do you mean by this conduct? Do you forget that you are dependent on me for your character—for your only honest means of living?"

"Time enough when I asts it of you," replied Bundle, proceeding deliberately with her packing.

Mrs. Balfour sat down and watched her, in suppressed rage.

When she had quite finished, she put on her bonnet and shawl, and, taking me by the hand,

"Come, my dear," she said. "We must go to papa."

Mrs. Balfour fired up.

"Go to your master?—You shall do no such thing. You can have nothing to say to him. He has already

sent you what is due to you, and desires you, by me, to quit his house immediately. His studies are not to be broken in upon for the whim of an insolent servant."

"I'm not his servant, 'm," said Bundle, "nor yours either. I'm discharged. I'm a visitor."

"Visitor!"

"I'll take a cheer, 'm, if you please," said Bundle, with a fine-lady flourish, inexpressibly absurd; "'praps you prefer the sof. I've called, promiscuous, for to see the master of this house—if there is such a gentleman—and see him I will. It isn't the fashion, in the company I've been accustomed to keep, to throw visitors out o' winder; and unless you does that to me, here I sits till Toosday-week. When I've told Mr. Balfour something very singler, that he ought to have known before, my carriage will call for me, and I shall wish you good morning, 'm."

"You can make your communication through me."

"Not, 'm, if I'm aweer of it," replied Bundle, calmly and decisively. "I prefers telling Mr. Balfour myself. I'm fearful you might forget it; and it's very particular."

"What do you mean? I have told you Mr. Balfour shall not be intruded upon. This is a mere pretext. Once more, will you leave the house, or will you not?"

"There's my boxes," said the dauntless Bundle.

"If you like to look 'em over, and see if you can find any of your veils, or spoons, or thingamys, do; but see master I will. Come, my dear."

She went to my father's door, still holding my hand, and knocked. A faint murmur replied, which Bundle chose to interpret as permission to enter, and in we went.

Papa was sitting at his table, as usual; his head supported on his hands. As he looked up I was struck with his altered and dejected expression. His countenance wore a strange, puzzled look, like one awakened from a troubled dream, and he seemed hardly to recognise us.

"Please sir—I beg your pardon—I've something on my mind," said nurse; "p'raps it was my duty to let you know it before; but seeing you was so wrapped up, I didn't like to trouble you; and while I was with the dear boy it wasn't no matter, though he might have got his death on the cold flags; and even if he isn't spiked, it's horrid to see, for them as haven't been used to it, you know."

"Death?—spiked?—of whom are you talking nurse?" asked my father, passing his hand over his forehead.

"Of Master Philip, sir, your dear boy—bless him! . . . He—he—oh, don't be frightened, please sir; he's a sollambliester."

"My son a solemn blister? Is the woman mad? or

am I?" said my poor governor, piteously, looking round in a kind of helpless way.

"Walks in his sleep, sir," explained my nurse.

"So do I, I think," replied papa, still holding his temples, and looking strangely disturbed. "What is all this about? What—what were you telling me?"

Bundle explained, as briefly as she could, that I had been, for years, subject to the habit of sleep-walking. Scarcely a week passed without my rising from my bed, and moving about the room; these excursions being limited only by the impossibility of getting any further. Bundle always carefully secured both door and window, and watched me with untiring vigilance—the more anxiously, since she had come to the conclusion—perhaps a just one—that my own consciousness of the habit would only tend to confirm it.

Now, however, it had become necessary to mention the matter, in order that the dear boy might be properly attended to; or, concluded Bundle, solemnly, "his 'ed will be on the pavement, and his blood on somebody else's."

Therewith she passionately kissed me, curtsied to her master, and withdrew. I clung to her gown, but she whispered me, if I did she should give way; and didn't I wish to see her behave like a woman before my new mamma?

So she passed through the nursery, where Mrs. Balfour still sat, with a formal courtesy.

But that lady could not let her depart without a shot.

"I have warned you, Martha Bundle, that you must not rely upon me for a character."

Nurse stopped short. She took out a letter: it looked very much creased, and was rather yellow, but she flourished it triumphantly, so close to my step-mother's nose that she involuntarily recoiled.

"Here's something worth all the characters you won't give me," said Bundle, "if they was a trunkful! A gentleman on his knees asks me to come nine thousand miles for to be his wife! He has a house, and garden, and twenty-one cows, and two hundred men under him. P'raps, 'm," continued Bundle, with a last touch of the drawing-room manner, "you could recommend me a lady's maid for the voyage? I know you are partic'lar about character, and any one as *you* recommends—— Yes, my dear boy" (bursting into her natural manner, and covering me with kisses), "it's true: I'm going over the salt seas. I wouldn't have left you, not for fifty Mar-jorams; but you see I'm turned away, and must go somewheres. I'm afraid you'll miss me, my child, but you're growing a big boy now, and you'll soon be able to take care of yourself. Say your prayers, Philip; remember *who* it is takes part with the orphan (and you're a'most as bad), and if they are cruel to you, tell *Him*."

Bundle was gone.

Her story was perfectly true. Marjoram the irregular had reformed at last. It was rather a remarkable history. Even you, Miss May, may remember it, though not the hero's name, for Marjoram had laid up his own in lavender, and embarked on his remote expedition under a borrowed one—that of "Silas White."

A convict ship, you may recollect, took fire in mid-voyage, having on board at the time a dangerous amount of powder and ammunition. The fire was in fearful propinquity to the magazine, and, when discovered, had gained such head, that, independently of the explosion, there was even much risk in making a way to the scene of danger. While every one hesitated, a gallant fellow, one of the convicts, volunteered the dangerous duty, and, forcing or groping his way through the dense smoke and rapidly increasing flames, succeeded in drowning the magazine. That peril past, the disciplined efforts of the crew subdued the fire, and the vessel reached her destination in safety.

The conduct of the brave fellow, "Silas White," being duly reported, he received a conditional pardon from the local government, and this being confirmed from home, and the man's conduct continuing exemplary, Silas White, *alias* Bill Marjoram, was appointed sub-warden of the convict establishment, with house, garden, allowances, and, as Bundle had truly declared, two hundred men (convicts, certainly) under his control. He did not betray his trust: Marjoram had repented of

everything except his love for Martha Bundle, and as she had once sorrowed over his misdoings, he now entreated her, in a manly letter, to come to him, and be the joyful witness of his complete reform.

She's doing it now.

After my nurse's departure I felt half-stupefied. So completely was she associated with everything around me, that I could hardly understand how the chair, the cupboards, the curtains, above all (oh, anguish!) the tea-things, would know her no more. I wandered aimlessly about the room, almost expecting to hear her kind honest voice assuring me that it was all a joke—that she would never quit her boy—that we had had our laugh—and now for tea!

Mrs. Balfour had taken herself off, but Stracey remained, and made some feeble efforts to comfort me. These I sternly repulsed, and, sitting down on one of Bundle's corded boxes, cried till I was exhausted. It did me good, however, and for the few ensuing days (as Mrs. Balfour and son did not show) I was tolerably cheerful.

But, my governor! . . . Since the day nurse left he had scarcely quitted his apartment. He had had a camp-bed put up in a corner; his grub went stealthily in on a small table, which was as quietly withdrawn when it was supposed he had done. The fact is, he had issued the most peremptory orders, that for one week no one was on any pretence to break in upon his privacy.

In the time mentioned he was understood to anticipate that the end of his long and difficult labours would be accomplished. This, I may say at once, was the formation of a new system of computation, based upon the discovery of certain inevitable results in the combination of figures. The effect would be to sweep aside whole masses of rules, and reduce calculation to a mere question of the time necessary for reference to certain tables my father had been labouring to construct.

We have heard of calculating boys—chaps who can answer the most varied and difficult question in numbers, weights, and measures, without even having recourse to their five fingers. (By the by, doesn't this number of digits prove that nature herself is in favour of a decimal system?) My father had a conviction that he had hit upon the method adopted by the youths I have mentioned, and that it was communicable. This was his work.

Of course his directions were rigidly obeyed. Meanwhile, an air of mystery and expectation pervaded the whole house. My stepmother began to visit the nursery—always with a gliding step and subdued voice, and clearly desirous of hearing everything she possibly could from the interior. It was plain she partook of the interest created in the event.

At last the day arrived, at noon of which my father had intimated that his labours would conclude. During the whole morning the most profound silence prevailed. I, alone, forgot my duty, in looking for my musical cart,

but as that toy was not to be found, there was no harm done. I concluded it had either been stolen by the amiable Augustus, or secreted, as a measure of precaution, and therefore consoled myself with the tranquil domino.

Just before twelve my stepmother crept into the nursery, and held a low and anxious consultation with Stracey; then they stole towards papa's door and listened.

Not a sound.

Midday sounded from the clock in the court-yard.

"Ha, ha!" shrieked a voice from within. It was not like my father's—*could* not be his!

We all listened breathlessly.

"School's up!" shouted the strange voice.

There was a quick stamping of feet, as though in impatience; a sound like the eager rending of papers; then a low tinkling, a curious musical noise, like—but it could hardly *be*—the sound of a child's musical cart.

Louder—more distinct, it grew, until at last we heard the wheels, and the noise the horse made, as he was lifted and bumped along the floor.

My stepmother put her lips to the keyhole.

"Philip!" she cried, gently.

No answer.

She tried to look through the orifice, but it was stopped up.

"Philip!" (louder.)

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha! School's up! school's up!" cried the voice.

Mrs. Balfour was leaning on the handle of the door, as she knelt, unaware that it was not otherwise secured. The knob turned under her hand, the door opened, and she sunk forward into the room.

What a sight!

My governor was crawling round the apartment on his hands and knees. He had on his head one of my baby-caps, with a pink rosette in it. A quantity of ribbon was round his neck and arms, in the fashion of harness, and he was 'drawing after him my musical cart. There was a look of vacant enjoyment in his poor face, as terrible as it was unmistakable even by *me*, as he crept on, still crying out at intervals:—

"School's up! school's up!"

My poor father! School was up, indeed! Table and floor were covered with the fragments of his laborious calculations, torn to bits. At the very moment success seemed about to crown his efforts, the overtaxed brain had given way. Who can tell the immediate cause? The "system" to which he had sacrificed so many years, perhaps so much home-happiness, might have been—probably was—a delusion. If it were, is it not possible that the sudden conviction of its impracticability, flashing like madness into the student's brain, had left the ruin we beheld?—a catastrophe scarcely less fearful than that which usually attended the experiments of the

gold-makers of old, ending them and their dreams together.

Ah! Miss May, I'm but a young philosopher, and not much used to moralising; but I think—indeed I do, and, besides, I'm *sure* of it—that many a darling hope and fine illusion will slip from us in like manner; many a weary scholar close his books, and cry “School's up!” like my poor governor, before we compass the thousandth part of what we seek to know. Therefore, I vote we try with zeal, and yet with humbleness, to do the work nearest our hand. Who can tell what good angel has not placed it there? So that at least we may have *something* to show, when Nature—reverend schoolmistress—wearied with vain tuition, cries:—

“School's up, my children. Close your books. Arise. The great Examiner comes . . . and He will tell us all things.”

To return to my poor governor.

The change wrought in him was indeed of the most astonishing kind. His intellect was not destroyed; but, as it were, stricken back forty years. His wisdom, like shorn Samson's strength, had departed in the twinkling of an eye. The stern, self-reliant, strong-brained man, had become fit companion for a child. Silent he was, as ever; but when he did speak, it was in the kindest, gentlest tone. He noticed only things present to his eyes, and evinced in them just the amount and description of interest observable in a child who learns their

character and use for the first time. He liked to have me with him *now*; and treated me with an affectionate deference, which both puzzled and flattered me, until I discovered that the cause lay in his consciousness that I was the sole proprietor and despotic lord of certain things, in which his poor mind now recognised a surpassing significance, viz. the contents of the toy-cupboard!

The soldiers he had once dismissed in such a summary manner were now in a state of perpetual drill. He would muse for hours over jointed maps and pictures; was even content with a box of bricks; but the musical cart possessed an unfailing charm. He was never weary of its melancholy tinkle, and (poor dear!) viewed it, as he put it reluctantly aside, with a respectful tenderness, that, awe-smitten as I often felt at the mysterious change, almost made me smile. Dear old governor! we had indeed become friends at last, and now got on but too well together!

Thank goodness, my stepmamma gave herself but little trouble about us for a while. She was busied in making herself acquainted with the precise state of my father's affairs, and had soon got everything into her own hands. My father had no immediate relations; and as Mrs. Balfour declared herself affectionately anxious to assume the sole charge of her afflicted husband, nobody, of course, offered to suggest a better guardian.

As for the beloved Augustus, he was kept as care-

fully from my sight as though my nursery had been the sty of a savage boar.

It was not long, however, before my stepmother grew jealous of the extraordinary influence I exercised over my poor father. This was the more unacceptable to her, because her own presence had no other effect upon him than to render him fretful and impatient, and she consequently began to plot against our peace. This, my dear Miss May, ushered in the most painful period of my life.

Up to the time I speak of, I had continued to inhabit the nursery. There also slept Mrs. Stracey; for the sole purpose, I apprehend, of ascertaining whether my nocturnal proceedings were, or were not, in harmony with Bundle's assertion.

In due time that commissioner issued her report: to the effect that my slumbers were all that could be desired (I can't say as much for hers, for her snoring frequently kept me awake), and, in fact, more nearly resembled those of a certain familiar toy than of a human, intellectual being. Upon this, Mrs. Balfour decided that my wanderings were a matter of pure fiction, and proceeded to execute a diabolical plan, such as a woman's malice alone could have suggested.

She announced a change in the domestic arrangements. It appeared that, within the previous day or two, I had really grown too old to require constant watching. Besides, Mrs. Balfour absolutely needed the

services of her personal attendant. I must be considered a man, and have a whole room to myself.

Though slightly alarmed at Mrs. Balfour's affability, I did not at all dislike the proposed change—quite the contrary. I therefore assisted, with alacrity, in putting my clothes and other effects into the large linen-basket, for conveyance to my new apartment. Just as this job was completed, Mrs. Balfour made her appearance, attended by Augustus, who never came but when he scented prey. At present, that young gentleman seemed in the highest glee, as though fresh from some scene of animal or insect torture, and goggled and chuckled to such a degree, that I was seized with a burning desire to grasp his fat throat, and complete the choke with which he seemed to be contending. Better feelings, however, prevailed, and now the procession was formed. A housemaid, carrying the basket, led the way. Then followed Mrs. Balfour, leading me, with rather a gaolerish grasp, by the hand, Mrs. Stracey and Augustus bringing up the rear. Rather to my surprise, we went down-stairs, crossed the hall. Is it possible? Yes, it is even so. We stop at the Judge's Chamber.

"Open the door, my love," said Mrs. Balfour, softly, to Augustus.

The youth obeyed, pretending to be in a state of intense alarm.

We walked into the dismal room. It wore a dusty, moth-eaten look. The floor creaked under our tread,

and a sort of crack went round as though something were going to fall. There was a plume of dun-coloured feathers crowning the canopy of the old-fashioned bed; and these, which had perhaps nodded over the perturbed slumbers of the old man-hunting judge himself, quivered drearily in the draught of the opened door. I thought of the terrible stories, and the mysterious light, which even my father had admitted to be no delusion, and tried to draw back; but the grasp that held me grew still more gaolerish; and now, Mrs. Stracey, throwing open the doors of a huge linen-press, big enough for the effects of a hundred little boys, began to arrange mine within it.

"This is your room, my Philip," said my stepmother, with a malicious grin. "A very nice room, too; isn't it, my sweet boy?" (I had rather she had called me 'little hound,' as in her heart perhaps she did.) "Plenty of room for walking in your sleep, too."

"And if Philip should stroll out of the window," added Augustus, "it's really nothing of a tumble."

"I won't stay here; I won't!" I cried out; and, wrenching my hand from my stepmother's, didn't I cut away across the hall, up the staircase, and never stopped till I got into my governor's room! During the run, however, I had had just time to remember how little my poor father's interposition was likely to avail; and it was almost without any definite hope or purpose that I threw

myself into his arms, and called out that they were going to put me into the Judge's Chamber—the horrible haunted room, where the light and the noises came.

My father attempted no verbal consolation: perhaps he did not clearly comprehend my fear; but his smile melted away into a sort of grave sympathy—an expression of more meaning than I had seen since his change.

He set me on my feet, rose, and walked to his cabinet. From that repository my dear governor extracted the musical cart—I hear its mournful cadence now—looked at it, and at me, wistfully enough—sighed; then, with an effort, placed it in my hands, and turned quickly away. Does this, as I relate it, sound absurd? I tell you what, Miss May, some of the grandest actions that ever provoked the world's applause may have cost the doers less.

By this time my stepmother had arrived in pursuit. Some feeling I cannot explain checked the desperate resistance I should certainly have offered had the battleground been different. As it was, I sullenly yielded my hand to Mrs. Balfour, and was again conducted down-stairs into the haunted room, where Augustus received me with a yell of derisive laughter.

But the aspect of the long-avoided chamber was too much for me. I felt I could not—dared not—inhabit it; and my small spirit rebelled against the inhumanity, as I thought it, of condemning me to that dreary abode,

when one out of at least half-a-dozen other apartments might have been allotted me.

"I won't! I won't!" I exclaimed, stamping with childish passion. "I won't stop here. I'll die first. It's the ghost-room. Nobody ever sleeps in it, and I won't. Why do you show your teeth like that?" (N.B. Mrs. Balfour had a pug-like way of retracting her thin lips when excited.) "You're like — like ——"

"Like *what*, bad boy?" (with a shake.)

"Like T — T — Tormentine!" I cried.

(Tormentine, as you probably know, Miss May, was a distinguished member of the Ogre family, with an especial taste for a six-year-old broiled boy.)

My stepmother did not approve the simile.

"Do you hear the little wretch?" she shrieked, her whole face whitening with rage, as I've seen the sea do in a squall. "Boy, I'll ——" She checked herself suddenly, looked round the room, then whispered a word to Augustus, who darted out. After that, she relaxed her grasp a little, and said, in a milder tone:

"You don't like this nice room, sir? Well, well, let us see if we cannot find one to your fancy."

She led me into the hall, and down a gallery, at the end of which was a room called the "little library," for there were two. This one had a double door, the outer of the swinging sort, covered with baize. Augustus was waiting, and entered with us.

When we were fairly in, and the door swung to—

“Now, my dear young friend,” said my stepmother, “it is time that this amiable temper of yours should be properly rewarded. I am very much to blame for not having looked to this before. Henceforth, my child, Tormentine will know how to command the respect and obedience of her little charge. Scream, love, as much as you like; nobody will be disturbed. Tormentine likes to know that her corrections are *felt*.”

Augustus put a riding-whip into her hand.

I had never been punished in my life, and scarcely knew what it meant. But I had not much time to speculate. Mrs. Balfour, with a clever twist, managed to secure both my arms with one of hers (she had almost the strength of a man), and with the other inflicted a spiteful stroke.

Although the pain elicited a scream, I did not repeat it, but remained silently staring up at her face. The fact is, I thought she meant to kill me, then and there. Like most children, I had no fear of death. I only wondered what it was like to be dead; and further, how many such blows it would take to kill me. At present, the strokes she continued to deal only seemed to stimulate my vital energies; for, the pain growing more and more intolerable, I kicked and roared at last with all my might, while Augustus skipped round us in an ecstasy of glee.

At last, when her arm was tired (not sooner, I ima-

gine), she let me sink upon the floor, where I lay for some moments, perfectly exhausted with excitement and pain. After a while, she ordered me to get up and follow her. I did so, for I was regularly subdued for the time, and would have yielded a stupid obedience to anything in the world. We went back to the Judge's Chamber, whither my stepmother summoned Stracey. That party undressed me, bathed my smarting shoulders, and put me to bed. Mrs. Balfour and Augustus had gone already, and Stracey was about to follow, when the sense of loneliness and of dread caused me to clutch her by the gown, for I was still too much exhausted to speak. She wasn't a bad person, old Stracey, and I suppose she easily guessed my meaning; for she drew a chair to the bedside, and remained there, holding my hand, till I fell off to sleep, for I don't remember her going; and, when I awoke again, it was nearly dark.

Finding myself alone, my first impulse was to dash under the clothes, clasping my ears at the same time, in order to keep out any terrific sound. I was obliged, however, to come up to breathe; and the change being cool and pleasant, perhaps soothed my irritated nerves, for I did not feel disposed to dive again, but, saying over one of my hymns, presently went to sleep; and so it came to pass that my first night in the haunted room was a perfectly happy one.

At seven o'clock the sun looked right in at the half-open window, and called me up. I felt quite gay, and

self-satisfied, as if I had accomplished some great exploit. The haunted room was not so terrible, after all. It would be capital to disappoint Mrs. Balfour, and let her see that, so far from being disgusted, I highly approved the change!

Such, my dear Miss May, were my morning musings. Alas! my troubles were all to come.

It was at this unhappy period of my life I made the acquaintance of the Little Fierce woman.

Who was *she*?—I only wish you'd tell me.

My three great sources of anxiety in the haunted chamber had been the midnight knockings, the judge's candle, and the judge himself. Well, the knocks I never heard. The candle did not once trespass on the province of the rushlight now allowed me. And, to the credit of the departed bench, the judge himself refrained from giving me the slightest annoyance.

But the Little Fierce woman! My worst anticipations of the haunted room were nothing to the reality of suffering inflicted on me by the agency of this strange—what shall I call her?—being. I know very well, Miss May, before beginning, that you will not believe what I'm going to tell you. But it's true; every word true. I told you before that I had somehow been mixed up with unaccountable occurrences all my life; but this of the Little Fierce woman is the strangest of all.

One bright morning (in that unspectral manner my

story begins), after I had for nearly a fortnight occupied the room, I chanced to awake a little earlier than usual, for it was just before the great house-clock struck six. Though my fears had much decreased of late, it was always nice to wake and find it *day*; and I lay still for a few minutes, enjoying the sense of security and peace that comes with the blessed sun.

At last, I turned lazily over on my side, looking towards the window. As I did so, my eyes fell full upon an object not familiar to me among the articles in the room—one I did not remember to have noticed after I was put to bed. At all events, it certainly had not occupied its present position.

The aspect of this object was by no means terrific. It bore the appearance of a large white sack, or a fat bolster, set right up on end, with a knob at the top, about the size of your head. It stood upon the open floor, without lateral support, three or four paces from my bed, and in the centre of a broad beam of sunshine streaming in at the window. There was something in it that puzzled me extremely. Can you fancy a sack taking up an attitude? There was something in the bearing of *this* that struck me as remarkable, and chained my gaze upon it in a stupid fascination. Presently—but not without such an effort as one makes in turning one's back upon some distrusted thing—I rolled back to my former posture.

It was there, before me!

I opened my mouth to scream ; but no sound would come. With clenched fingers and dilated eyes I gazed upon the now terrible sack, utterly powerless to call for aid. In a moment or two it began to exhibit motion—to revolve—turned entirely round—and presented to me the figure of a short, thick woman, in a sort of heavy, white-hooded cloak, which descended so as to conceal her feet. The countenance she exhibited made my blood run cold. If ever ogress existed, this must have been her holiday aspect. I saw nothing but two eyes, which, opening and brightening, more and more, as she glared at me, glowed at last like huge green lamps ; and a mouth which, literally—not figuratively—stretched from ear to ear. The jaws projected somewhat like those of an animal, and the upper lip flapped loosely over immense brown teeth, like those of an old horse, as the hideous being threw back her head in a perpetual horrid laugh, the more frightful from being unaccompanied by the slightest sound.

I closed my eyes, hoping to shut the apparition out. But it was of no use. I saw her just as plainly. And now she raised her hand, and seemed inviting, or daring, me to follow. Her look seemed to exercise some magnetic power ; for, terrified as I was beyond anything I can describe, I was conscious of an irresistible inclination to obey her.

First I put one foot out of the bed, then the other ; never, for a second, taking my eyes off the little hag.

A curious mingling of rage and fear drew me on to follow, and catch her, if I could! But I couldn't. The spectre retired before me, mowing and beckoning. It was as though I heard her say:—

“Aye! do! do! Catch me! Come and catch me! Aha! You can't! You can't! You can't! *Now*, fly at me—now! Aha! foiled again! Come and play! Come and play!”

All this while, I had really been following and doing my utmost to reach her; and now, made furious by her taunts, I gathered all my strength for a frantic rush. This time she did not retire; but, lifting her arm, struck me a sharp blow on the forehead. I staggered, and went down; my eyes grew dark; I was insensible.

— At least, I suppose so; for, when I recovered, the horrid old woman was gone, and I could not remember seeing her departure. I was lying in the middle of the floor, where she had felled me, bleeding from the nose, and with a severe bruise on the forehead; for the old thing's fist was just as hard as iron. As I could hear people moving about the house, I rang the bell, and then, sick and exhausted, crept back to bed.

In a few minutes, Stracey came; and to her I related, as calmly as I could, all that had occurred. Stracey smiled; then looked very grave; and, when I had concluded, declared she would tell her mistress, and

beg for a change of rooms; or that somebody might keep me company, and see fair play with the naughty old woman.

But Mrs. Balfour was incredulous, and would not be entreated. She affirmed that the adventure was all nonsense—that I had been merely walking in my sleep, which I might never have done but for the fuss that had been made about it; and that the only changes necessary were, the removal of any dangerous sharp-edged furniture from the apartment, and the locking of my door.

The first portion of this arrangement was hastily put in practice, but the idea of sleeping another night in the room haunted by the little old hag was not to be endured. Accordingly, another fight took place, in which I was worsted as before, received a severe whipping, and was finally conveyed to the hated room. Stracey, however, on this occasion stood my friend, and not only promised me, secretly, to forget to turn the key, but actually stole down and slept for two nights on a couch which occupied a recess in the room. This gave me courage, and on the third night I announced my resolution to sleep alone.

My courage, I am sorry to say, departed with Mrs. Stracey; and when the closing of a distant door seemed to shut me out from all immediate intercourse with the other dwellers in the house, I bitterly repented of my temerity. After a time, however, sleep came to my aid, and nothing, on that and several succeeding nights, occurred to disturb my tranquillity.

It was a deceitful calm, Miss May. One night I happened to be particularly wakeful. No posture was comfortable, rest I could not. My pulse beat violently, and my heart made such a noise against the pillow, that the very sound contributed to keep my senses awake and active. I had never felt so miserable. In vain I repeated my hymns and prayers. A sense of something horrible impending, gradually absorbed every other feeling, and at length became so insupportable, that, strange as it may appear, I was neither startled nor greatly alarmed, when, turning on my right side, I saw the Little Fierce woman standing in the middle of the room, grinning and beckoning as before.

I rose on my elbow and looked fixedly at her. It was somewhere about midnight, but a brilliant moon looked in at the window, and made the room quite light.

"Come! come and catch me!" the old hag seemed to say, wagging her hideous head, till the loose upper lip flapped like the leaf of a book. "Come and play! Come and play!"

I rose in an instant like a slave, and stepped out upon the floor. I was not half so much frightened as on the former occasion, and seemed possessed with a consciousness that so long as I did not *touch* her, she could do me no harm. I therefore repressed the inclination I still had to fly at her, and only quietly followed as she retired. The room-door was open, though I remember Stracey having closed it when she withdrew, and into the hall

we passed. The stones were dreadfully cold to my stockingless feet, and it was rather a comfort when the old hag passed into a large saloon, opening from the hall, in which there was a Turkey carpet. There she paused; and while I was yet wondering whither she would next conduct me, the great green lamp-like eyes grew suddenly bigger and bigger. The hideous hag was rushing upon me! Before I could evade her she pushed me back with a force sufficient to send me reeling against the door, and was gone. I crept back to bed.

Though I related this second affair to Stracey, we agreed not to mention it further. The visits of the spectre were less fearful to me than the taunts and tyranny of my stepmother, whom I was beginning to hate with all the power of my small mind. Any opposition to her will was certain to bring down upon me some fresh punishment, and I resolved to afford her no opportunity I could possibly avoid.

Thus, for a space of three months, did I endure the occasional presence of the old spectral woman. She came, in all, ten times. Sometimes she did not quit the room; at others, she would lead me through the hall and gallery, the lower rooms, the conservatory, even out upon a broad terrace, the sharp gravel upon which hurt my feet not a little, for the savage old woman never would let me put on my shoes, or, indeed, any other portion of my day attire. Without suffering any direct injury from these visitations, I found that they began to

tell somehow upon my spirits. It was the having to keep them secret that worried me. But to whom could I confide them? Stracey, indeed, believed me. At least, she had faith in my persuasion that I *was* suffering from this spectral persecution . . . but I knew she thought I only dreamed what I related. In vain I had pointed to my bruised forehead; in vain I showed her my scratched feet. It was no use describing to her the exact way we had walked, and the very doors the ghost had opened. When Stracey found that neither she nor I were strong enough to pull back the ponderous bolts—a duty always performed by the gardener—she was only the more confirmed in her belief as to my dreaming powers. But *dreams*?—Bosh!—I had all my senses about me, and knew and saw everything that passed just as well as I see *you*.

Why, for example, as one night I was following the old hag across the hall, I saw the big house-cat pounce upon a rat, just as *I* was longing to pounce upon the old brute I was condemned to follow. Puss, however, was frightened by our entrance, and bolted. The next day I told Stracey what I had noticed, and there, behind one of the hall pillars, we found the deceased rat. Dreams! People don't dream like that!

Perhaps you'll wonder why I was not even *more* terrified. *I* did myself. But the truth, I suppose, was, that passion and irritation subdued the lesser sense. I felt enraged at the cruel, unreasonable old thing. What

harm had I done her, whoever she was? What right had she to come teasing *me*, darkening a fellow's life with her detestable presence and horrid recollection? Was it because I had no mother, no friend, no companion, to take my part? Cowardly old wretch! As if it wasn't enough that I had a tyrant by day, but must be worried by this night hag, too!

Questions like these I proposed to the old object herself. In fact, I made nothing of abusing her in the strongest possible terms; but she only came more frequently, stayed longer, and became more energetic and commanding in gesture and grin.

A crisis came at last; and, terrible as it was, opened the door to my emancipation.

I wish I might jump over the rest of the old hag's history, and land at once at Old Styles's. No?—Very good. It's not long.

One night I had gone to bed in a towering rage. My stepmother had bullied me all day, on pretence of lessons; but shaking, pinching, and pulling out hair, don't help to teach one words of three syllables! I was regularly done up, worn out with a sense of injustice and useless indignation; and, for the first time in my life, I forgot to say my prayers. That's a fib, too. I did *not* forget; but, when I kneeled down with a heart bursting with passion that would not go away, though I tried to make it, I confess I thought it best to get up, and not to mix such revengeful wishes

against others, with prayers for protection for myself. I was not satisfied, however; for, after a little doze, I woke with a kind of start or thrill, such as attends the finding one's self in the presence of sudden danger without a weapon. I knew that this was the result of my omission of the accustomed duty, and felt inclined to get up and repair my fault.

While I hesitated, the point was decided for me. An unusual tremor came over me, accompanied by that singular feeling of excitement which was the invariable forerunner of a visit from the Little Fierce woman.

She came, of course—came, looking more hideous, more malignant, than ever before—came close up to my bed. ("Oh," I remember thinking, "why did I forget my prayers? She would not have dared *this*!") I fancied she was going to strike me, and tried to cry out; but, as usual, without being able to articulate a sound.

"Come, get *up*—come, get *up*—come, get *up*"—said the old wretch, with the sort of savage *chuck* she always used. "Upstairs—upstairs—now's the time. O-haw!—O-haw! Work to do—work to do—do-oo," with a dying hoot, like that of a retreating owl.

I rose as usual, my heart throbbing with fruitless rage. Back she went into the hall, but instead of leading me, as before, through the lower rooms, began to ascend the stairs backwards, pausing upon each step to grin and beckon. The first apartment we came to,

at the top, was my stepmother's boudoir. Here the hag came to a dead halt, and raised her arm. I put up mine instinctively, to ward off the blow, when I found that I was grasping a large shining knife! A feeling of horror and despair came over me, for it flashed upon my mind that the miserable demon was luring me to the commission of some dreadful deed, while, at the same time, I knew myself utterly powerless to resist her. What if she should direct me to strike at my sleeping tyrant?

I was not kept long in doubt. She passed through the boudoir, and into the chamber beyond, the door opening noiselessly behind her. Now I could hear the sleeper's regular breathing; likewise, more distinctly, the snoring of the precious Augustus.

With the knife raised in my hand, I approached my stepmother's bed. Suddenly the old hag appeared on the other side, signing to me with her inexorable hand to strike.

I looked down at the pug-like face, the thin retracted lips, the spiteful expression, which not even sleep, the softener and beautifier, could overcome; and I was struck with the resemblance between her and the frightful being that had led me to her bedside. Why had I not noticed it before? There must be some connexion between them More and more alike! I scarcely knew at which I was looking. There was, indeed, *but one*; for, while I gazed, the standing figure

seemed to stoop forward, sink into, and mix with, the recumbent one; still, to the last, inviting me to strike. The thought rushed upon me—Is it then intended that I should at one blow rid myself of both?—and do they themselves require it?—I lifted my arm

Crash!—Darkness. I was flung, reeling, against a table, and went down, half insensible. When I recovered, the chamber was a blaze of light. My step-mother was sitting up in bed, shrieking wildly, and lighting match after match, which she stuck into every safe place, till she had surrounded herself with a little illumination; Augustus, meanwhile, echoing her cries, and tugging the bell-rope at his bed's head as though for very existence.

Lights came glancing along the passage, and up the stairs; lots of half-dressed maids, armed with pokers and other lethal weapons (which no peril could have induced them actually to use), the cook, with more forethought, bringing an immense bucket of water, under the impression that fire alone could have created such an alarm.

In the middle of the floor sat a little boy in his night-dress; a broken rushlight, over which he had stumbled, on one side, and a large ivory paper-cutter on the other. He looked (and felt) the most bewildered of the party.

Mrs. Balfour, who had risen and assumed her dress-

ing-gown, seemed to take a very correct view of the matter.

"If this," she remarked, examining the paper-cutter, "had been of steel, I should really have thought the bad, wretched boy, intended to murder me in my bed!"

"*You asked me—*" was on the tip of my tongue, but I didn't say anything; what was the good? The servants, except Stracey, were dismissed; and I, after being shaken and slapped, with the promise of a more satisfactory punishment in the morning, was bundled into a china-closet at the top of the stairs; a blanket was thrown in to me, and, the key being turned, I was considered harmless till the morning.

I am bound to say that my stepmother fully redeemed her word. I received a merciless flogging, after which a solemn investigation was held; when, Stracey admitting that she had neglected to secure my door as usual, it was decided that I really *was*, as Bundle had averred, a "sollambliester." It was of little use denying it. I told my story, however, formally; but, of course, was not believed, and the judges explained everything to their own complete satisfaction. I must have caught up the paper-knife as I crossed the boudoir. As to the opening heavy bolts and bars on former occasions, everybody knew that the act of sleep-walking brings with it immense physical powers! A baby has been known to pull up a bucket that three strong men —. But why record examples? The thing was clear enough without.

Oh, of course! Lucky, the boy's habits were at last understood. The whole place might have been burned to a cinder. My poor Augustus! What a mercy!

It was resolved that no such risks should be run for the future. I must be sent away. Yes—to school. A good, strict school. It was true that those good old establishments, where boys were ill-fed and worse educated, cheated, and bullied, all at the small charge of thirty-five pounds a-year, were rapidly dying out; but Mrs. Balfour thought she knew of one place that would answer exactly. In the mean time I should return, for the few intervening days, under Stracey's care, to my old quarters in the nursery; not, indeed, as a measure of indulgence, but of precaution.

So actively did my stepmother bestir herself in carrying out her resolution, that on the fourth day I was informed a school had been decided upon, and that I was to set out for it on the following morning. It was somewhere on the outskirts of a cathedral town in the north, and was under the direction of a gentleman, equally distinguished as a scholar and a disciplinarian—a man of singular ways, and of so independent a character, that on the very slightest interference on the part of parent or guardian with his peremptory rule, he made nothing of packing off the pupil by the next conveyance. This was just the sort of man my stepmother desired to find. She would send me, with a bad character in my pocket, to this determined gentleman, and leave me to my fate.

The terms were high, but that she didn't mind; for she was obliged to spend a certain amount a-year in the furtherance of my education, and of course didn't much care *how* it was got rid of.

The name of the tyrant in question was Styles—"Old Styles," as I subsequently found. He had about seventy boys; and, somehow, in spite of his terrible reputation, and the remarkable habit I have before referred to, of sending away such scholars as he might not maltreat after his pleasure, always managed to have a sufficiency of victims under his rule. It was, in short, the very place of all others for a chap without any friends; and Tormentine—Mrs. Balfour, I mean—was so delighted at the issue of her inquiries, that she was positively kinder to me the whole of the day preceding my departure.

For my own part, the life I had recently led had been so entirely miserable, that I would have hailed an apprenticeship to a chimney-sweeper as a welcome variety. Supposing that Old Styles stopped anything short of boy-slaughter, he could not treat me worse than Tormentine, and at least there could be no haunted rooms to fear. So, upon the whole, I rejoiced at the coming change, and was conscious of only one feeling of disappointment—that of not being able to pitch into Augustus before I went.

My dear governor's condition had become worse of late. His bodily health remained the same—was even

better than it was during the days he had devoted to study. But his mind grew more and more clouded and confused. He had almost ceased to recognise me; took no interest in any external objects, but sat alone dumbly gazing into the empty fire-grate, or out of the open window at the hurrying clouds. Sometimes he would give a sudden start and shiver, as though awakening from a dream, and begin counting confusedly on his fingers; but soon stopped again with a perplexed sigh. It was melancholy to look at. Once he caught me crying; and then, to my surprise, feebly beckoned me to come to him, when he took both my hands, and looked closely into my eyes with an expression like that I saw on the evening he brought home my "new mamma." Bundle always declared, that when I cried my eyes were exactly like my mother's.

I had aged and ripened wonderfully since nurse's departure; and the idea of taking a long journey all by myself, partly in a stage-coach, partly by rail, had almost the romance of a fairy-tale.

Accordingly, on the memorable morning, I mounted the coach with a mingled sense of delight and curiosity. The leave-taking was brief, for nobody was up but Stracey, who had seen my box placed in the boot, and held a secret conference with the coachman, in which the latter doubtless received instructions to transfer me to the rail at Serbiton, supplying me with a ticket to my

destination, in —, where, at the Talbot Inn, I was to be met by one of the under-masters, and from thence escorted to the school.

I'm not going to describe the journey; that's impossible. Most people remember their first ride on the top of a coach. That whirring through the air, the fresh morning air, with the pleasant rattle of the wheels, and the real beautiful dust rolling in volumes about us, and assuring me I was actually *travelling*, altogether made me as happy as I had ever felt. Had I been going to the den of a real ogre, I don't think it could have prevented my enjoyment of that blessed ride!

At Serbiton I passed, like an ordinary package, into the care of a stout gentleman in blue, with a badge and pouch, who gave me a biscuit and put me into a railway-carriage, with strict orders not to get, or even to look out, on peril of my life; pointing at the same time to a printed notice, too small for me to read, which stated, I understood, that the friction of a little boy's eyes, acting transversely upon the electric time-tables, had been known to occasion most lamentable accidents. Taking which seriously, I huddled myself into a corner, and sacrificed the pleasure of gazing at the landscape, as we went whirling along at what must have been a prodigious rate. There was only one other occupant of the carriage, a fat man in a red comforter, who had looked up as I got in, snorted, scowled, and gone to sleep.

About three in the afternoon we dashed, screaming, into an immense city, and stopped. My friend in blue took me out, and led me up to a long carriage, on the top of which I saw my box. It seemed crammed to the door with women, babies, and baskets.

"Full! full!" shrieked a chorus of eager voices.

But the very fattest old woman I ever saw, before or since, said, good-humouredly, that she could make room for such a slip; and what do you think she did? Took me on her knee! Where she found that useful joint, I cannot say. She seemed "flush" down, from her nose to her feet; but I found myself sitting *somehow*. I was half-inclined to resent this, as an indignity to an independent traveller; but she was a kind-looking, cheery old soul, with a Bundle-ish air, so I sat still; and it was very soft and comfortable.

In a few minutes we stopped.

"Young ge'lman for the Talbot—left till called for," sung out the conductor.

Down clattered my box. The fat woman gave me up (I think she wanted to kiss me; but that I *wouldn't* stand), and away went the vehicle.

A waiter and porter had come out together. The former looked at me from head to foot—it wasn't far—and signed to the porter to take up my box; who winked, and did so.

"Passage 'll do," said the waiter, elliptically. "Nobody an't come for yet."

Both of them scrutinised the address, as the box was put down in the passage. The waiter gave a sort of "cluck," and tossed back his head.

"If I wa'nt afeard so!" I heard him say. "Poor little chap! Young un, too; an't he? Tell 'e what, Jem, if I had *fifty* sons I wouldn't."

The porter shook his head, as much as to say, under similar patriarchal circumstances, no more wouldn't *he*—turned, looked kindly at me, muttered to the waiter, and withdrew.

"Hungry?" demanded the latter, turning suddenly upon me.

I replied, I thought I could eat a bit of pudding.

"Pudden," repeated the waiter, in a tone that might either be simply meditative, or else intended to correct my pronunciation. "Pudden! True. 'Taint much more of that *you'll* get. Well, well. Pudden 'tis, and pudden you shall hayve."

There was a gloom and mystery about this waiter's manner, that, in spite of his good nature, somewhat depressed my spirits. I didn't like the scraps of conversation that had reached my ears. Then, again, the man seemed to look at me with a sort of melancholy, not to say, dismal interest, such as I could hardly reconcile with my present improved condition. Was my being destined to Old Styles's *really* such a pitiable fate?

I had not much time to indulge misgivings; for in

a brief space the waiter reappeared, bringing with him a mutton-chop and a jam-pudding. My appetite awoke at sight of the viands, and I ate nearly all.

After that I looked out at the window.

Just within view I observed a tall, round tower, flanking a huge gate, heavily spiked. It appeared to be part of a much larger building, not visible from the window, and reminded me forcibly of the castle in which Sir Hilbert de Corbyn defended himself for fifty-five days—being from Old Martinmas till St. Prisca's Eve—against his justly-incensed rival, Sir Reginald de Granville; and was only overcome at last through his rash acceptance of a challenge to single combat, wherein the said Sir R. de G. (though thrice mortally wounded) declined to fall, till he had disabled the said Sir H. de C. by one of those back-strokes which never fail to lop off one's antagonist's sword-arm; and I wonder they don't try them oftener.

I asked my friend and patron, the waiter, whether there was not a castle of L——?

The waiter responded to my question with another:

"Is there," said the waiter, "whales in the lotion?"

Though I did not distinctly perceive the connexion of the subjects, I replied that I had read so.

"Then," rejoined the waiter, "there's a castle in L——."

"With turrets and drawbridge, a moat, and men-at-arms?" I asked.

"Can't say about that," replied the waiter, filling up a sauce-cruet with water, and shaking it well, to look black. "But there's a pleaseman or two, and the turnkeys, and a warder——"

Warder! I pricked up my ears at the word. (Sir Hilbert de Corbyn had a gigantic one, who proved a great embarrassment to the garrison, as he consumed half a sheep daily; but it was thought politic to keep up his stamina.) If I could only obtain a glimpse of the interior of this mystic fortress!

"Could I," I asked, tremblingly, "*see* the castle?"

"Right afore you," said the waiter, pointing up the street.

"Get in, I mean."

"Well—hem! you see they an't much accustomed to chance-visits. They likes to have notice when great folks comes. Tell 'e what—if you're *very* anxious—you won't meander away? And you'll come back directly after?"

"Yes; directly, directly."

"Look 'e, then," said the waiter, illustrating with his finger on the table the scheme of the enterprise. "You takes your cap, and you walks straight up to that gate. There's a small door in the tower, on your right hand, opposite the barb——"

"Barbican. Yes, yes; I know."

"Barber's shop," resumed the waiter, with a slight frown. "That's the wicket. There's a knocker." (That

rather chilled the romance.) "You knocks, and asks for to see the warder. Whether he's there, or whether he isn't there, you says, civilly, you're come to see the castle. If they makes any bones about it, you says you're fully aweer that it's open to the public, and you demand admittance. If they don't let you in *then*, you comes back, without looking into the shops (mind), and tells *me*."

So counselled the friendly waiter. He then brushed my cap and jacket, and forth I sallied to attack the castle.

It loomed out considerably as I approached, and its frowning grandeur seemed to rebuke my temerity. I was half-inclined to run back; but, turning my head, I caught sight of the waiter standing at the window; and, like the noble damsel on the battlements, waving a napkin in encouragement.

On I went, and knocked. It made a tremendous reverberation! A bolt was drawn, and out stepped an enormous man, with a bushy beard. His face, though great, was good-natured; and he turned it about in every direction, pretending he didn't see me, I was so small. I touched his knee.

"Oh, I ask your pardon, I'm sure, young man! I thought it was the lord mayor, and I was looking for his carriage. What may *you* please to want?"

I told him; and, as he appeared inclined to demur, added what the waiter had suggested.

The giant warder laughed.

"Hallo, this an't no joke! this an't! Here's the Public a come to see the castle, and nobody ready. Turn out the guard there. Tell the governor he can't sit down to dinner yet, at no price. Where's the p'leece, and the millingtary, and the matron?" cried the warder, pretending to shout up the corridor.

Another big man sauntered smiling in (he seemed to understand his friend); and to him the latter consigned me, telling me it was "all square," there was ladies within, and I might join them.

There was scarcely anybody to be seen; and as we crossed a court-yard, I plucked up courage to inquire of my conductor whether there many prisoners in the dungeons.

"There's no dungeons here, bein' cells," replied that individual, with dignity. "As to prisoners, we've a tidyish lot, just now; but most of 'em are out at work in the wood-yards, and the rest in the 'firmary, with the Heppydemmic."

I longed to learn something more of the mysterious person he had named, and what was the nature of the torture he was doubtless engaged in inflicting; but, at that moment, we came upon a party of eight or ten people, chiefly ladies, who had carried the castle before me, and were now surveying the interior under a guard of honour, composed of a tall, hard-featured old fellow, with a bunch of enormous keys.

The latter looked at me from top to toe.

"Just in time for the Museum," he muttered.

"Museum!" Could the old villain mean that I was to be captured, killed, and stuffed? My heart began to throb; but the unruffled demeanour of the rest of the party assured me that no harm was intended, and on we marched in procession.

We went through a gallery, where the prisoners were accustomed to feed out of a long wooden trough; through another, with dark cells on each side, shut in with doors two feet thick; and then we came into a stone chamber, the whole of one side of which was occupied by an iron cage—a coarse curtain being hung just within the grating, so as to conceal what lay beyond.

Our conductor unlocked an iron wicket at one end, and entered the cage, leaving us outside. He then drew up the curtain.

To describe the hideous assortment of what he called "curiosities" is quite beyond my power. Though utterly ignorant at the time of the peculiar species of interest attaching to each object in this "museum," there was a ghastly significance, a positively thievish and murderous aspect about them, that seemed of itself to supply all necessary information.

There were guns, pistols, daggers, knives, skulls, bones, ropes, garments, clubs, masks, lanterns, I know not what besides. But all had the same grim, villanous

look. The guns and pistols were old, battered, and rusty; the knives stained with horrid marks, as though the record of the last foul deed had been purposely left undisturbed. But the bludgeons were the most frightful and tale-telling of all—thick, black, and shiny—looking harder than iron, and perhaps less merciful in their operation. There wasn't an honest sword in the whole collection! All the metal weapons were pikes or knives—ugly, sneaking, round-the-corner, under-the-hedge sort of instruments. You know what I mean.

In a sing-song tone, without any stops, and scarcely looking at the articles, as he mechanically touched each at the proper time, the old chap began:—

“This is the razor with which Abraham Bolderson cut his wife's throat having fell in love with another woman at Bumbleby near Thorp Yorkshyre and was hung for the same this is the knife with two blades a bottle-screw and a horse-pick with which Peter Blake killed his master mistress three children a babby in arms and the servant-maid what was a-carrying of it and then threw it into a draw-well where it was discovered in the year one thousand eight hundred and forty-two being upwards of fifteen years after the perpetration off that horrible deed this is a cast of the 'ed of Samuel Jenkins Phipson otherwise the Cockchafer hung for horse-stealing they don't do that no longer this is part of the irons of the notorious Dick Turpin being the foot-pin weighs twenty-two pounds this is the bludgeon with which

Adolphus Sweetlove knocked his wife on the 'ed *she* got better he was transported this is the skull what's left of it leastways of Daniel Clark as was killed by Hugene Hairum what was a husher in a school this is the 'at of Phelim O'Loughlin supposed to be an Irishman what killed his 'complice one Mike Sweeny having lured him from his house on pretence of dividing plunder and fractured his skull one hundred and ten yards from his own door which they say the door could never be perwailed on to shut afterwards and had to be took down this is the razor of Jonathan Martin what cut his throat having previously set fire to York Minster and the lucifer match with which he did the same this here's a kining machine of curious make what was took with the gang as used it and a lot of articles of miner interest forming as singular and remarkable a collection of criminal curiosities as ever was witnessed in Europe."

Down went the curtain.

Wasn't I glad when the old man had got to the end of his catalogue! I had begun to feel very uncomfortable—with an indescribable longing for fresh air—and the consciousness that I was within the very walls where the doers of these atrocities had passed their last miserable days nearly turned me sick. Plucky as I was—(I may say it without conceit; for, after all, it's no merit—it's a natural gift), all I now desired was to make my escape out of the horrid place as speedily as possible. Fortunately, the rest of the party partook of my senti-

ments on the subject; and a particularly nervous old lady, in a buff bonnet, setting the example of flight, away we all scuttled down the corridor, across the yard, through the lodge, and out at the open wicket; the warder, who was standing at it, making no opposition, but simply grinning and touching his hat to the retreating public.

I went, like a man of my word, straight back to the Talbot, and reported myself to the waiter. Nobody had inquired for me as yet. It was growing dark, and the shops, beginning to light up, assumed such an attractive appearance, that I, at last, though with some difficulty, prevailed on the waiter to let me go out for a few minutes, just to look round, taking with me, in case of accidents, the card of the hotel.

Choosing a direction leading from the castle, I wandered along in a sort of dream, a real "sollamblisten," for the time. The shops, especially the jewellers' and glass warehouses, glittered with all the splendour of fairy-land, and you won't be much surprised, Miss May, to know that, in about five minutes, I was a lost boy. I had turned several corners; and being tempted up a passage with a glazed roof, and splendid shops on each side, and having emerged therefrom at some side-entrance, I became hopelessly bewildered.

I thought of the probable grief and rage of the waiter, and hastened to inquire my way of a boy who was carrying a can of pies, and whistling loudly on two

fingers; an accomplishment which, even at that moment of anxiety, I regarded with envy.

This boy suggested that I should re-enter the covered place, taking the north-west passage, instead of the south-by-north, which, it seems, I had erroneously selected; after which, the fifth alley on my left would conduct me to a small square crescent, from whence the Talbot could be distinctly seen; leastways might, if there wasn't nothing in the way.

As I seemed still a little perplexed, the good-natured boy went on to remark, that there was indeed a shorter cut, and he would himself put me in the road, provided I would purchase the two pies he always sold to an old gentleman who lived the other way, and whose appetite only served him at ten minutes past six, whereby it only wanted half a minute to the time.

I had never had any money in my life, however; but though I was thus unable to comply with his conditions, the kind lad absolutely insisted on accompanying me to the end of one street, when, pointing down another, he told me to keep right on till I came to a bridge—not far off—when it would be all right.

I thanked him heartily, wished him good night, to which he responded with a triumphant flourish on his digits, and set off as fast as I could run.

The kind boy was right. There *was* the bridge, and it *wasn't* far. But it didn't look as if it was the way to

the Talbot. On the contrary I could plainly distinguish trees and meadows with faint, elevated lights, as though on the sides of distant hills. There were plenty of people about, and a number of these were hurrying down a by-road that led (as I found when I got to the bridge and looked over the parapet) to one of the meadows. About the middle of this I could distinguish a very large high tent, with flags on the top, and lights streaming from every canvas pore from which a ray could possibly peep out. There were persons standing and moving all round it, and music and loud voices came faintly from within. It was evident something very particular was going on. What could it be? It was only a few hundred yards to the scene of action. I determined to run down, and I did.

The music had ceased, but I could now hear the voices quite plain. The people outside were listening eagerly, like myself, and some small boys had thrown themselves flat on the ground, and, thrusting their heads forcibly under the canvas, lay like decapitated corpses, so intently were they engaged in watching what was in progress within.

From what reached my ears, it would seem that a most rancorous dispute had been for some time raging between the members of two noble houses, for I distinctly heard a gruff voice, as if speaking through a beard, remark that the wrongs enjured by the sons of Braschino del Poppaccio, at the hands of Pindelmonti,

had at length reached their climax. Revenge would no *more* be cheated of her prey.

Thereupon followed a stamping rush, and —

“Villyn! Lose thy gripe! Will ye do mur-ur-rurder? Lose me, I char-r-r-ge ye!”

The canvas walls shook spasmodically.

Some one seemed to rush in.

“Ha! Keind angels! I’m then in time? Unhand him, sarrah! . . . Die, caitive—die!”

A clashing of weapons succeeded, the blows falling with extraordinary regularity, as though each combatant struck, and then politely waited for a return.

The caitiff, in spite of being so earnestly exhorted to give up the ghost, seemed to show considerable fight; and it was only after a protracted struggle that his head, coming bump against the canvas and stopping there, a round brown lump, showed that revenge, in the person of the descendant of Brashino del Poppaccio, had after all got the worst of it.

While I stood half-bewildered at this tragical result, and wondering at the apathy of the spectators—for I knew, by the buzz and murmur, that there were many within—there was a sudden diminution of light through the crevices, part of the canvas was pulled aside, a very broad ladder let down, and forth came an immense crowd, pressing, jostling, and talking at the highest pitch of excitement. I had not had time to get fairly out of their way, and was swept along, fighting as if for life, pushed,

hustled, and nearly thrown off my legs. Bitterly I regretted my folly in leaving the hotel, when a big ploughman, forcing his way through the crowd, knocked me full against a stout old lady, who collared me on the spot.

"May I never!" said the old thing, "if here isn't my sweetheart! Look, Patience, here's the young man as tried to kiss me to-day in the 'bus! Oh, you shocking young scamp! Here you are at the theayter when you ought to be a-bed. Where's your nuss?"

I explained that Mr. Styles did not receive nusses with his pupils, and begged the jolly old lady to put me into the road to the Talbot.

"Come on; 't isn't far," said she. "I'm going past it myself; but we shan't have to walk, for here comes the 'bus, going to the train, and it stops to take up at the hotel. So come along. Now, Patience."

Patience, who carried a baby, a basket, some shawls, and an umbrella the size of a little tent, and who was probably the old lady's married daughter, put her best foot foremost, and we arrived at the bridge in time to intercept the omnibus, which, in five minutes, safely deposited me at the Talbot.

I almost dreaded the meeting with my friendly waiter, and was making up an apologetic tale, when I encountered him in the passage. He looked pale and depressed. His hand was cold, as he grasped mine, and led me to the coffee-room. He neither wept nor scolded;

but the quiet reproach of the man's eye went to my heart, and said distinctly :—

“Is it come to *this*? Did I warn you against meandering, that you should come for to be took home in a promiscuous 'bus?”

Afterwards, he brought me some tea.

It was now nearly nine o'clock, and still nobody had inquired for me. What was to be done? The waiter appealed to his mistress, and it was decided that the hotel fly should be got ready, to convey me to Mr. Styles's before bed-time—the distance being little more than a ten-minutes' drive. In the interval, the waiter's dejection became more and more observable. He did not make any remark, but he sidled about the room, in a purposeless manner, seeming unable to withdraw from me his melancholy gaze.

As the fly was heard coming round, the waiter became suddenly invisible; but returning just as, in obedience to the suggestion of the porter, I had got into the vehicle, he pressed into my hand a little packet, about three inches square, muttering in a hollow voice, that came rumbling into the dark carriage as into a vault:—

“Keep 'em for the last pinch. If you're druv very hard, them'll keep life in you for a week. Your eyes is like a lady's as I lived page to, before I ris to be a waiter; but your name wan't hern.”

“My name never was Hearne—and mamma's name was Aubrey,” I said, “before she married papa.”

The waiter started and clutched at my hand in the dark, but missed.

"Tell 'e what, if you're murdered, *you come here!*"

The carriage drove on.

So completely was I confounded by the waiter's extraordinary instructions, that it was some moments before I thought of looking at his present. When I did, it turned out to be a small pasteboard box, half filled with black, clammy particles, and labelled—as I saw by a lamp we passed—"Luncheon Lozenges."

Keep "life" in me for a week! "Murdered!" "My eyes!" What *did* he say about my eyes? I began to be seriously alarmed. Was it possible my wicked, cruel stepmother had really betrayed me into the clutches of some wretch, who had agreed to kill me by slow and safe degrees—gradual starvation, or perhaps a long course of general ill-treatment? I had read of such things, and certainly believed Tormentine to be capable of any amount of cruelty. I was tired and exhausted, and could not think coherently. I cried a little, and then got better, and looked about me.

We drove very fast. The road at first was cheerful enough, but in a minute or two, quitting the gay, busy streets, we passed into a duller neighbourhood, where the houses began to thin. Garden-grounds—a field—a brick-kiln—a church—then a hill, up which we walked. Presently we came to a large cemetery, surrounded by a tall iron railing, in which I saw hundreds

of tombstones turning their white faces to the rising moon.

The driver turned suddenly round, and spoke, with a grin, through the window:—

“Near home *now*, sir!”

It wasn't a cheerful moment, nor a cheerful tone. But I was out of spirits—that's the fact. We crawled on.

By and by we approached a forbidding-looking pile, with two little towers; the whole encircled by a high wall. It looked more like a prison than the castle itself! My heart sank, and I inwardly prayed that *this* might not be Old Styles's. I let down the window, and asked the coachman what was that place?

“Alas House!” I thought was the answer, though the noise of the wheels might have prevented my hearing distinctly. What a name! Everything seemed contrived to deepen my melancholy. But as we passed the angle of the wall I read on a white board, “Pallas House—Establishment for Young Ladies.”

A little further—so little that the driver did not trouble his horses to resume their trot—we arrived at another large house, within another high wall, only twice as high as the former, and then stopped. The driver got down and pulled the bell, which gave forth a hollow, dissonant jangle, and might have been heard for a mile. It did not ring into the house, but resided in an ivy-matted hutch of its own, just within the gate.

We waited—rang again—and again waited.

"Gone to bed, I shouldn't wonder," said the coachman, falling back to see if there were any lights in the windows. There were none. All was dark and silent as a tomb. We were about to try one more summons, when we heard the house-door open, a light step came tripping down the stone path, and the gate was unlocked by a very pretty servant girl. She had on a particularly smart cap, with cherry ribbons, and looked, somehow, nervous and agitated.

"Young gentleman for Mr. Styles's," said the coachman, who had already taken down my box.

The girl nodded—tremulously requested him to take the box within doors—and, that being effected, refastened the gate, and conducted me into the interior.

Dismal enough it seemed! A long stone passage—doors in deep recesses—no lights—no furniture.

"Want any supper?" said the maid, rather sharply. She did not seem to like me. I wondered *why*?

I shivered, and declined.

"Then perhaps you'd like to get to bed?"

I consented heartily to make that effort, and we passed on. Coming to a door that stood slightly ajar—

"Schoolroom," said the girl.

"Please 'm," I inquired meekly, "what time do the boys go to bed?"

"Half-past nine."

It wasn't quite that yet, for we passed a clock in the

passage that said so, but there was no sound from the schoolroom.

We passed through a room half-filled with most extraordinary things, such as I had read of in stories of the Inquisition—racks, chairs, wheels, knotted ropes, &c. I gave an involuntary start, and the girl herself shuddered, and muttering in my ear,—

“Them’s horrid-looking things,” hurried on.

We went up-stairs, and entered a long gallery with rooms on each side. The maid opened one of the doors, and, holding up the light, said :—

“Senior dormitory.”

Long ranks of beds, but not a sound to show that they were tenanted. Then we went to a room opposite, in which were from twenty to thirty beds.

“Junior dormitory,” said the girl. “This will be yours, I s’pose. You an’t afraid to sleep alone, are you?”

Alone! In that immense dismal room! Why, where, I asked, were the boys?

“Three days ’dishonal holidays,” replied the maid, “’count of the dismiss of old Mr. Twittleton.”

I was both too sleepy and too shy to inquire why the “dismiss” of an elderly gentleman to another state of being should be commemorated in this pleasant fashion; and the maid continued, with a peevish toss of the ribbons :—

“They come back the day after to-morrow. There an’t none of them torments here yet.”

"That's a cram!" shouted a voice; and bang came a bolster, knocking the candle out of her hand, and leaving us in total darkness.

"Very well, Master Sharpe!" exclaimed the damsel. "If Mrs. Morfew doesn't hear of this before I'm six minutes older, it's——"

"Bash!" said Master Sharpe, "mother M.'s not at home. But you can write by telegraph, Sukey, my love; and just add, with my best respects, that Susan Bunce has got on her raspberry ribbons, and asked her young man to tea. Cr-r-r-rk—wheesh. *Here's* a light."

And he ignited a lucifer, which exhibited Susan blushing like a poppy. She relit her candle without a word, and then proceeded to turn down one of the beds as far as possible from Master Sharpe, whom, she murmured, she never could abear!

"Put him here, Susan, that's a darling, next *me*," said Master Sharpe: "I want to inform his youthful mind. He's got lots to learn before the fellows come; hasn't he, Susan? Poor little chap! I say, though, isn't it a shame? We shall breakfast in bed to-morrow, Susan; hot rolls and sausages at ten Come, make haste, child; somebody's getting jealous."

Susan withdrew, disdaining reply.

I was glad to have some company, at any rate, and Master Sharpe seemed a merry, good-natured boy. Rather to my surprise, however, his merriment ended with the departure of the candle, and a dead silence

succeeded. Somehow I did not like to begin, and waited in polite impatience for my friend. At length a sound of sniffing and sobbing broke the stillness of the chamber. Was it possible? . . . Surely, yes! Master Sharpe was crying!

Much alarmed, I begged him to tell me what was the matter. Was he ill? Could I do nothing? Might I call assistance?

"As-sis-tance!" repeated Master Sharpe, in a hoarse hollow tone. "Did I hear aright? Nay, correct me if I have mista'en thee." (He clipped his words so that I with difficulty understood him.) "'As-sis-tance!' Poor, deluded chap! Yes, O yes . . . If Superintendent Chawemup, V division, and sixteen men, aided by the county constabulary and such military as could be hastily drawn together, were to make a combined assault—I do not affirm that it would answer—understand me as saying it is barely *possible* that some portion of our bodies might be recovered in a highly lacerated condition, for the satisfaction of friends. I undertake nothing further."

I entreated Master Sharpe to explain himself more clearly.

"Unhappy Master——! I beg your pardon, Master——"

"Balfour—Philip Balfour."

"Unhappy Master Balfour! Of what crimes, young as you are, have you been guilty, that you are immured in this den of misery? Speak! oh, speak!"

I begged him to compose himself, adding that I had not the slightest objection to do as he requested; and then assured him that though *I* had done nothing of an atrocious character, papa had married again, and——

"Enough, boy," interrupted Master Sharpe. "In those two words—*injuncta noverca*—(which you haven't used)—all the horrid history is told."

"Do tell it *me*, then, please," I said, almost crying. "Oh, sir! what's the matter? You seemed pretty cheerful just now, when you flung the——"

"Do you take me for an idiot, boy?" demanded Master Sharpe, sternly. "Betray my feelings in the presence of the monster Styles's hired spy, and sworn tormentor, Sukiana Bunce! Not so verdant, sir."

I inquired, in a rather tremulous voice, if Mr. Styles was really the tyrant he had insinuated; and, further, if the boys' friends knew it?

Master Sharpe sat up in bed to give emphasis to his remarks.

"Styles, sir," he began, "is no common cut-throat: he disdains the use of knife and bowl. (You are, no doubt, aware that poison is always administered by bowl-fulls.) It is said, moreover, that Styles has an objection to these familiar agents, on grounds not unconnected with the jurisprudence of this country. The tortures he delights to inflict address themselves exclusively to the nerves and stomach; from thence to the mind. Old Styles is cautious in his proceedings. He is not prodigal of blood. He confines himself rigidly, with a self-denial

worthy of a better cause, to the destruction of two boys per quarter. Start not!" continued Master Sharpe, rebuking my involuntary movement, "you have more to hear. Thus then, Styles, by scrupulously limiting his practice, escapes those suspicions that might else attach to him.

"I do not wish," concluded Master Sharpe, feelingly, "to alarm a new boy unnecessarily, and one to whom the practice of pupil-slaughter is apparently new. He may not tackle *you* for some time to come. And if he does, you may not succumb for a considerable period. The last boy took three months to kill."

I remembered the waiter's hints, and my heart died within me. Had I escaped the Little Fierce woman, and the tyranny of Tormentine, to fall a helpless victim to this Styles?

I determined to ask but one other question, and then resign myself to my fate.

What was the mode of treatment usually resorted to for the destruction of these young martyrs?

"Styles," replied Master Sharpe, "has an inquisitive mind, elegant taste, and considerable fertility of resource. His system may be called the 'poetry' of murder. He wouldn't give twopence for a fellow's life, unless it were prettily taken! He gives us, for example, all sorts of comforts—the jolliest things in the world, lots to eat and drink, plenty of rest and play; but he has a jocular method of administering these things, which

somehow deprives them of their advantage. Thus, salt beef is not a bad thing. Neither is beer. But if you get only salt beef one day and only beer the next, the result is one day of hunger and one of thirst. Do you want to know the bill of fare? Mondays: Salt beef, as much as you can eat—no beer. Tuesdays: Beer, horse-radish, treacle. Wednesdays: Cartloads of periwinkles and pickled cabbage. Thursdays: Suet pudding, after which Yorkshire pudding, with a second course of Norfolk dumplings. Fridays: A general assortment of pig. But I need not go on. It's the ingenious arrangement of the dinners, not the want of something to eat, that tells upon our constitutions.

"It's the same in other things; lessons and play, 'relaxation,' as he calls it; and precious relaxing you'll find it, young man, when Styles comes stalking into your room with his lantern, some cold sleety night, about half-past one, singing out, '*Now, gentlemen, a splendid night for cricket. Be in the playground, wickets pitched, in ten minutes.*'

"Did you ever play at cricket by the light of three lanterns, at two in the morning, in a bitter north wind in April? If that an't a ghastly sport, I should like to know what is. Now and then Styles has a fancy that we need exercise, and off we march, two and two, about nine o'clock in the evening—just upon bed-time—and prowl about the downs like a band of young smugglers practising land-manceuvres preparatory to a run! It's

this doing right things at rum times that, as I told you, tells upon the nerves of the fellows; and when Styles sees which are affected most, he pitches upon two particular chaps, and they're booked, you see."

"Booked!" said I, faintly. "What! killed, sir?"

"Bash! He doesn't hurt them. Oh, no. On the contrary, he's kinder than usual—pats their heads, and asks them into the study to sup with him and Mother Morfew, otherwise Queen Mob (she wears a mob-cap), an ancient cousin of his. They don't last long after those suppers begin," said Master Sharpe, gloomily. "I don't know the precise properties of fried skate, or whether cold plum-pudding and cucumber, taken to excess, form the lightest supper you can sleep upon. There's a cemetery not far from here; you may have noticed it. . . . But we will not dwell on *that*. All I know is, that the bed you can just see in yonder corner, with a curtain dividing it from the rest of the room, was occupied by the last of these victims to—to—what shall I call it? an irresponsible pedagoguecracy—poor Bob Quilter.

"That chap's constitution was remarkably sound. His vital energies were immense, and he held out for several months. But he gave up at last, and died, poor old boy, bequeathing to the school *revenge* and a red-pole! His ghost is frequently seen; usually in the cricket-season. 'Twas a game he loved. He was often umpire

at the top wicket, and it was rumoured last half, that on the occasion of a violent dispute whether or not Bill Stumps had been run out, Bob's voice was heard to pronounce emphatically:—

“‘*Home!*’

“But, as the princess observes, in the ‘Arabian Nights’—(precious short nights they must have been, for she never talked for more than ten minutes)—I perceive the approach of dawn. It is time your majesty consulted your pillow. In other words, Master Balfour, you go to sleep.”

I did.

It was still darkish, when the pealing of a heavy bell aroused us both.

“Don’t you wish you *may?*” was Master Sharpe’s only remark, as, turning round, he nestled himself into a new and comfortable position.

We slept two or three hours longer, when, as it appeared that Susan wholly disregarded the breakfast orders of the preceding night, the pangs of hunger impelled us to rise and explore. We descended into a large room below the dormitory, whither, in a few minutes, a maiden of very sinister aspect brought us two cups of tepid tea and a plate of bread and butter. This despatched, Master Sharpe offered to conduct me through the precincts, first premising that, in consequence of the extended holiday, which was itself owing to the death of a near relative of Styles’s (rendering his

attendance necessary), everybody was absent, except the maids and his unlucky self.

He had, he informed me, returned a week since, in consequence of a slight difference with a crabbed uncle, originating at a cricket-match, at which he, Master Sharpe, had taken the chair at lunch, and been shortly thereafter drawn from under it, in a state to which callow chairmen are not unfrequently reduced.

Mrs. Morfew would, no doubt, return in the course of the day. Also, the two resident masters, Messrs. Thummles and Boreham. Old Styles would himself appear on the following day, and the fellows, generally, might drop in at any time, the whole of them not having been advertised of the additional holiday.

There was nothing very noticeable about the place. The schoolroom, and indeed all the apartments, were spacious, light, and clean, some of them with great comfortable fire-places at each end. The dining-room had a sliding panel communicating with the kitchen, through which the dinners passed, in the hottest manner. There was a beautiful playground—a field of about two acres, just large enough for cricket, the towering walls intercepting any balls not sent unskilfully high. A neat gravel walk ran round it, and at the further end were a few shrubs, and a bower composed of the forward portion of an old boat, stuck upright.

Altogether, there was nothing in the aspect of Old

Styles's much in harmony with the ideas conjured up by the discourse of the night before: and as Master Sharpe, far from reverting to those painful topics, dwelt exclusively upon the future's sunnier side, I felt tolerably happy, and able to relish greatly my companion's sketches of the character and peculiarities of the "bigwigs," as he termed them, of the establishment.

Styles, the Terrible, he forbore to describe farther. He would prefer leaving that inscrutable man to my unassisted judgment. It was possible (he thoughtfully remarked) that a young fresh mind might receive a truer impression concerning him, and be enabled to cast some light, however feeble and imperfect, upon this human phenomenon, to whom he would not again refer.

Mother Morfew (elsewise, Queen Mob) was an elderly relation of Styles's, who looked after the house-matters, counted linen and spoons, bullied the cook, checked the bills, and did a lot of other things Styles would not condescend to, besides telling tales of the boys, and sporting the detestable head-dress from which she took her name. "A stern old specimen you'll find her" (said Master Sharpe), "with an intense hatred of all school-boys, dealing with them as with an order of young lunatics, every one of whose actions and words is a natural object of suspicion." Apart from this foible, she had, it appeared, plenty of sense. She was weak, indeed, in her grammar—had early in life discarded the letter *h* as an absurd incumbrance; and always, after

grace, requested the servant to remove "them kivers." She had come originally on a visit for three days, and had, at the time of my arrival, stopped fifteen years longer.

Touching the two masters—if these gentlemen were in reality anything *like* such "rummy coves" as Master Sharpe reported them—my impression was that Old Styles might have hired a brace of clowns from the next village with equal advantage, and perhaps on easier terms.

The foible of Mr. Thummles was family. He was descended (and had been a considerable time coming down) from an ancient Norman house, the patriarch of which, Gaston de Thumberleigh, came over, or had proposed to do so (for his name does not appear in the roll examined by Leland), with William the Conqueror. It has been conjectured that he was detained by business connected with the commissariat, or clothing department, while a younger scion of the house accompanied the expedition; history speaking freely of a youth whose name (with the careless soldier-frankness of the period, reduced to "Thumb," or "Tom Thumb") is, even now, a household word.

How the high-sounding Thumberleigh had ravelled down into Thummles, and become associated with commercial interests, under the title of "Thummles and Tiddlethwayte," drysalters, was never clearly ascertained. Mr. Thummles adhered stoutly to his Norman

ancestry—the immediate bond and symbol being a huge copper seal, which depended from his fob, and bore a half-effaced heraldic device, of which all that could be made out was a crest resembling a pair of inexpressibles, and a motto, "*In tempore scissi*"—"I cut it," or "*have cut it . . . in time.*"

Now, of the assumption of this device by Gaston de Thumberleigh no authentic record exists. It has been indeed suggested that the words of the motto are in general allusion to his absence from the field of Hastings; or, if that be rejected, might not the expression refer to the punctuality with which the hero executed orders of the description symbolised in the crest, and supplied the Conqueror's army, in due season, with the most indispensable articles of their attire?

Mr. Thummles, who utterly eschewed drysalting in all its branches, retained the patrician predilections and characteristics of his ancestors. He took snuff—he had the gout—he wore a wig with a pigtail, the last of its species ever seen wild in the northern counties. Finally, he kept a diary—not a mere dry register of domestic occurrences, such as could only interest himself—but a collection of anecdotes illustrative of the characters of persons of quality, calculated to inspire reverence and emulation in those youthful minds to which occasionally, as a great treat, he would unfold the treasures of the volume.

Mr. Boreham, the other master, was a large, grave

man, whose likeness to Doctor Johnson had, it was rumoured, really done him good service. He dressed as closely as possible after the style of his great prototype, wearing a long loose coat, thick cravat, and brown top-boots, and carrying an enormous stick, or rather cudgel, in his dexter hand. He was the tenderest-hearted creature in the world, with the ways, and very much the aspect, of a bear.

Sharpe and I had become great friends by the hour of dinner, when the maid who brought us that meal announced that Mrs. Morfew had just arrived, and was in her tantrums—a circumstance which seemed to afford my companion immense satisfaction.

As we re-entered the playground the great bell announced another arrival; and soon afterwards two gentlemen strolled forth. I recognised them at once, from Master Sharpe's description, as Messrs. Thummles and Boreham.

Mr. Thummles waved his hand to us, much as a baron might acknowledge the presence of a couple of retainers, twiddled his copper seal, and strutted on.

"Sir," said Mr. Boreham to Sharpe, "the boy who is not dilatory in the resumption of his studies offers either an example of voluntary application, or an illustration of parental or avuncular punctuality. Sir, I am glad to see you. Sir, I trust your uncle is well?"

Master Sharpe replied, with as much brevity as politeness permitted, that it was all right with that

relative—temper excepted; but Mr. Boreham, having made his speech, had followed his friend.

None of the boys arrived that day; and as we were alone, Sharpe and I were honoured with an invitation to pass the evening with the masters in their room. It was very pleasant. We had tea, and toast, and apricot-jam. Mr. Boreham produced his flute; and, at Mr. Thummles's request, performed an ancient Norman war-hymn, sung by the fighting Troubadours on entering the field, but which, Master Sharpe assured me, differed in no particular from the melody, much in vogue in Ethiopian circles, known as—

“Hoop-te-tye,
The blue-nosed fly.”

And finally, when conversation and music slackened, Mr. Thummles was prevailed upon to open his diary, and electrify us with glimpses of that noble and exalted sphere of which he was so true a worshipper.

“Here,” said Mr. Thummles, regarding us with severe dignity, “is a little reminiscence of the days of the Regency—unpublished, you will recollect, and indeed unknown to almost everybody, excepting the parties interested and myself. Hem!

“Anecdote of George the Fourth.”

George the Fourth, when Prince of Wales, was, as

is well known, in the brief intervals of repose from the fatigues of the laborious office of heir-apparent, not altogether insensible to the pleasures of convivial intercourse. His Royal Highness was skilled in the *cuisine*. He was literally the prince of cooks, and might have been the cook of princes!

His Royal Highness had an especial fondness for a *tête de veau en tortue*; and, under the influence of this passion, has been known to wrap himself up in the brown great-coat and slouched hat in which he so successfully disguised himself on errands of charity, and, descending to the kitchen, cook the dish himself!

On the occasion of a dinner at Carlton House, at which Erskine, Luttrell, Lord Peterborough, and Tom Phipps, were present, one of the guests remarked, with some emotion, that one thing alone was wanting to the perfection of the *tête de veau*.

The Prince overheard the observation.

‘Aha!’ said his Royal Highness, tapping his snuff-box, which always lay beside him at table; ‘and what is that?’

‘A pinch of sorrel, sir,’ was the reply.

The Prince laid down his knife and fork, gazed wildly at the speaker, and burst into tears.

‘I—I forgot the sorrel,’ he sobbed. ‘The f-f-fault was *mine*.’

Yet persons have been found to say that his Royal Highness was, by nature, a cold-hearted man!”

A pause succeeded the reading of this extract. The fact was, that we did not know whether, in relation to themes of so exalted a character, applause might not be impertinence.

Turning over a few pages, Mr. Thummles stopped again.

"Here," he said, "is another record of those times; and, by the by, it discloses a little bit of history. I had intended offering it to Macaulay; but seeing that, at the rate at which his admirable romance progresses, it will be exactly two hundred and seventy-six years before the contribution could be made available, I kept it to myself. This is in confidence. Listen:—

"Origin of the Pavilion, Brighton."

At the banquets at Carlton House, before referred to, it was customary to dismiss the attendants, in order that the moral and philosophical subjects, so frequently introduced, might suffer no interruption. The guests, in consequence, assisted each other.

'Brummell, oblige me,' said the prince (he always pronounced it thus), 'oblige me with the pepper.'

With the easy familiarity which became that celebrated man as well as did his coat, Brummell caught up the pepper-castor and thrust it into the hand of his illustrious entertainer, remarking, as he did so:—

'For the third time to-day, George, I've had to

give you pepper. Confound it, sir! why don't you institute an Order of the Pepper-Box, and make me its chancellor?' he continued, in an under-tone, with a dig in the royal ribs.

'No,' replied his Royal Highness, 'I cannot do *that*; but I'll (pray give me the tarragon,) I'll build a Palace of the Pepper-box, and call it the Pagoda, Pavilion, Pumpkin—what you please. The people will call it Chinese. *We* know it's a pepper-box.'

The Earl of Eldon heard of this conversation. (He was at that time on the woolsack.)

'Humph!' said the Earl of Eldon."

"Please, sir, what did he mean by 'humph?'" asked Master Sharpe, humbly.

"How should *I* know, sir?" replied the diarist, tartly.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Thummles. I thought, sir ——"

"Thought!—You ought to *know*, sir, that nothing betrays ignorance so much as asking the meaning of the point of a good story."

"Sir, the point was so sharp he couldn't see it, said Mr. Boreham.

"Well," resumed Mr. Thummles, "I'll just give you one more extract; one of the most remarkable occurrences on record. Though its authenticity has been placed beyond all question, so marvellous, so inexplicable

are the details, that, in order to prevent their gaining publicity, unaccompanied by proper confirmation, I have noted them down, as you see, in hieroglyphics, on a system invented by myself. Good idea, eh? I've thought of offering it to government. Now, listen."

Mr. Thummles looked at his hieroglyphics with a slightly-puzzled air; then took off his spectacles—wiped—put them on again—hemmed—and began:—

"Extraordinary, but true.

Thomas Trum-pip-ping—Trumpington, was the son of a gun—gunsmith, residing in bed; that is to say, Bedlam—no, Bedford.

At the early age of fift—fifty-nine—ha?—no—fifteen—he was concealed—consigned, I mean—to an honest and much-respected quack—no, whack—whack—confound the cipher!—I have it—wharfinger—at Deptford; and, for a time, led a quiet and most execrable—stay, exemplary—life.

But evil asses—I mean, associations—set him astride—no, astray. One fat morning—(fatal, that is,) morning—in December, eighteen hundred and seventeen, it chanced that the—the—hey—the cat—the—cat? Really, these hieroglyphics almost beat me, though they *are* my own."

("Literally 'return to plague the inventor,'" growled Mr. Boreham.)

"Faith, now," resumed Mr. Thummles, "*that's* a curious word!" taking the general effect of it, as though he were examining a pattern.

His colleague suggested that he should read it as it stood.

"Well, but it sounds absurd," remonstrated the diarist. "I really begin to apprehend that I have forgotten the key to the abbreviations—hum—'um—'m—It's no use reading the cipher, you know.

"One fatal morning in December, eighteen hundred and seventeen, it chanced that the catepol swdl (with a cross), snicks (underscored) von kittlewig wak (thing like a donkey's head), foldrid pgfce jddldol bang.

"Now, what," inquired Mr. Thummles, in a grave and melancholy tone, "can you possibly gather from *that*?"

"*Nothing*," agreed the company, decisively.

"I wish," sighed Mr. Thummles, still poring over his inscrutable diary, "I wish I had written it out in plain English."

"Can't you recall the circumstances?" asked the other master.

"Impossible," replied Mr. Thummles. "If I could only remember what I meant by jddldol—Snicks I know—I——But it won't do."

And he closed the volume with an angry bang.

"Perhaps, sir, if you can't read it, you'll be so good as to *tell* us a story," suggested Bob Sharpe, meekly—

so meekly, that I felt sure there was som mischief under it.

The fact is, that Mr. Thummles—perhaps from the habit of never trusting his memory—had forfeited the same altogether. At all events, he had a peculiar faculty of forgetting names, dates, &c.; a circumstance which, I need not say, detracts considerably from the clearness of narration.

Mr. Thummles fell into the snare. He paused a moment—then began his story:—

“When I was residing at—now, where was it? Humph—no matter. But there happened to be a fellow living near me, by the name of—Bless me!—what *was* his name? We’ll call him Spoker.

“He had bolted from school (a thing no good boys ever dream of. They’d *die* first).”

[Master Sharpe gave me a nudge that said, “Perhaps they might!”]

—“A public school. I think, by the way, it was—no, it wasn’t—no matter—and away he went to sea. He entered, as cabin-boy, on board a vessel called the—the—I’ll be hanged now if I can recall her name. But this I do remember, that she was under the command of an old acquaintance of mine, Captain—singularly enough, now, that man’s name has managed to—But, at all events, Ibbotson—that is, Spoker—sailed with him for the coast of—psha!—I wonder I don’t forget my own name! But it proved a roughish trip;

and poor Silcox, that is, Ibbotson—Spoker, I mean—was laid on his beam-ends, very sick.

“They had dropped anchor off—hem—the—no matter—when the report of a heavy gun drew everybody’s attention. Great excitement on shore. People hurrying in all directions. The troops under arms. Flag-signals fluttering—semaphores tossing their arms like frantic giants—every elevated spot crowned with a knot of persons sweeping the horizon with their telescopes, or engaged in animated conversation.

“A boat presently put off from the battery-stairs, and pulled quickly alongside. It contained an officer of the—I don’t at this moment recollect to which arm of the service he belonged—but it was Captain—eh!—his name escapes me. He appeared in a state of considerable anxiety. Hurrying up to Captain—ha!—my friend—he eagerly announced that the celebrated French general—eh!—ha!—I forget—De la—humph!—had effected his escape! The entire island had been rigorously searched; and there existed no doubt that the illustrious captive had smuggled himself away in a strange vessel, known to have been hovering in the offing, and made probably for the coast of—hum!—ha!—or elsewhere.

“The only British vessels lying at—hum—the place—happened to be the—eh, you know—and, I think, the—other—both tubs of things—one being commanded by my poor friend—poh!—afterwards killed at—humph—in the—ha!—the other by—

thingamy—of—eh!—what is it? However, both were started off in chase, and, I need hardly say, never sighted anything but each other until their joint return—when—— but I will not anticipate.

“The governor, Sir Charles—no, Sir Gerald—now, who *was* it held that appointment?—entreated my friend’s assistance in the recapture of the fugitive. Of course it was promptly given. Everybody turned to with a will. Even poor Ibbotson—that is, Silcox—Spoker, I mean—joined in the bustle. They only delayed long enough to procure a few pats of fresh butter for the captain’s table, and some raspberry jam for a lady-passenger—and were thus enabled, in the course of the evening, to crowd all sail in pursuit.

“That cruise, Spoker assured me, lasted six weeks, during which the ship encountered fearful weather, and was once all but lost in one of those—eh!—furious things—and only saved by the presence of mind of the carpenter; who, perceiving that the vessel had sprung a leak, placed himself in the orifice, and gallantly—and literally—sat out the storm!

“To return, however, to the island. The hubbub had fairly subsided—the population in general were calmly discussing the event of the day—the governor was concocting a despatch, calculated to shift the blame upon the military authorities—the latter were laying their heads together for the purpose of inditing to the Horse Guards, in the peculiar grammar best under-

stood there, a countermining epistle, when the missing general, smoking his cigar, walked quietly in to supper!

"Politely interrogated by the officer of the day, the general explained that he had noticed, while shaving, the approach of a British vessel. Having learned by experience that such an event was invariably succeeded by his (the general's) exhibition, about two o'clock, to a large circle of *insulaires*, he had resolved for once to evade them.

"'Borrowing,' the general concluded, 'an excellent idea from your Albion, I ascend, like King Charles, *ze* biggest tree in zat amiable plantation under whose shade I smoke my ceegar, and am content *soulager les peines de captivité avec les souvenirs de victoire*. There I sit and watch, until I see zat M. le Capitaine have got his rosbif and his plom-kéque on board. I see the sails outspread. Adieu! Adieu! I kiss my hand. *Je descends. Me voici. Poof!*'"

"Ha!" said Mr. Boreham; "and *that*, sir, you denominate a 'story?'"

"I do, certainly," replied the diarist, with a half-defiant air; for he saw controversy in his friend's eye.

"Sir, in that case," said the other, "I will put it to any individual whose judgment is not warped by prejudice, nor his reason by self-sufficiency, whether the circumstance of a gentleman climbing up a tree and coming down again, may aptly be termed a narrative."

"I apprehend, sir," said Mr. Thummles, "the exact dimensions of a full-grown story were never legally defined. Besides, there are little stories."

"For little people," put in Master Sharpe, in his meek voice. "But we're big."

Mr. Boreham indeed looked even bigger than usual, as he rejoined:—

"Sir, a narrative, if I am not mistaken, is defined by the best writers to be a continued relation of the particulars of an event. Example: 'Cynthio was much taken with my narrative.'—(Tatler)."

"Tatler, indeed!" uttered a grating voice, as a repulsive-looking old lady, with a hitch in her gait, made a sort of limping charge into the apartment, and nearly knocked Master Sharpe off a box on which he was seated, into the fire. There was no need to tell me this was Queen Mob.

"Tatler, indeed!" snarled the old lady. "There's tattle enough for *one* while. You will have the goodness to take yourselves to bed, young gentlemen, and tattle there!"

All who remained uninjured from the sudden onslaught had politely risen.

"I don't speak to *you*, gentlemen,—I don't," continued Queen Mob, her cap nodding fiercely at the masters. "*You* may sit carousing all night,—*you* may." (She always corroborated herself after this fashion.) "I can't pack *you* off,—I can't. But the maids, they're gone

to bed, they are—and you can't have anything more from the kitchen; and it's time this house was quiet, it is." (The place had been like a sepulchre.) "Ho! you're the new boy, Balfour?"

I gasped assent, and heartily wished I wasn't. I didn't like her appearance. She looked at me, approvingly indeed, but with that sort of complacency with which a famished glutton might contemplate a plump white fowl, ready trussed for the spit!

In a moment her face relaxed into a cunning smile.

"Don't you think to deceive me in *that* way!" chuckled the old lady; "you're not so innocent as you look, you an't. Now, off with you both to bed; and *you*, Balfour, come to me to-morrow after breakfast."

"I'll tell you what she wants—no, I won't," said Master Sharpe, in a breath (and under it), as we went up-stairs. "But if you come out of her den alive, I'll tell you *then* what has passed, every bit, for six rock-cakes. Now?"

I declined the bet, for two reasons. First, I hadn't an idea of the nature or commercial value of a "rock-cake." Secondly, I had no money wherewith, if I lost, to pay.

But the next morning, with a slightly palpitating heart, I repaired as directed to Queen Mob's bower. There I remained one minute by the hall clock, and on my return to the playground Master Sharpe proceeded to vindicate his prophetic powers.

He told me, in the first place, that I had found the

lady stoning raisins. So she *was*! That she had invited me to sit down. She *had*! That a dingy-looking, yellow-faced boy, with a flat nose, was sitting in a corner, with a sulky air. Such a creature *was* so situated. That Queen Mob had pointed to him, and addressed me in manner following:—

“Master Balfour, I wish you to know that we have at least *one* Christian among us!—He-he-haw!”

That the flat-nosed boy had thereupon uttered a feeble giggle—risen—offered me his hand—and conducted me from the presence.

All this had indeed fallen out exactly as post-predicted by the youthful wizard. Nor was there anything extraordinary in Master Sharpe's clairvoyance. Queen Mob had one joke—the joke of her life—her only, her beloved one. Was it surprising that she vented it upon every new arrival, or that poor Christian Hohné,—the flat-nosed boy,—should, on his return after every vacation, be intercepted and kept in madam's parlour, until the joke, now in the fifth winter of its vigorous age, was duly perpetrated?

Christian Hohné was originally an importation from the Cape. A mystery hung over his parentage. He had no papa particular, nor any mother to speak of. An ancient Hottentot dame watched over his dawning years, until, in the child's ninth summer, a benevolent young English nobleman, who had himself visited the Cape some years before, and been perhaps struck with the

infant's loveliness, sent word over that he would charge himself with Master Christian's education and general future. He was now about fourteen, ugly, and ill-tempered. But his lordship's benevolence was not to be damped by these defects. He allowed his interesting "ward" threepence a-week, came every two years to see him, and had him home each alternate vacation to the cottage of the under-keeper. I may have something more to tell you of Christian. But, all in good time.

This morning the chaps began to arrive fast enough. The cross-tongued bell scolded incessantly. Big boys, little boys, chaps with stand-up collars, chaps with lie-downs, some only in their first jackets, and three giants in tails! They didn't look at all like victims, but came bounding into the playground, flinging up caps, screaming, and greeting each other (where especial friendships existed) with well-delivered punches or jocular kicks. The form of salutation most in favour seemed to be for the party who happened to be nearest the newly-arrived to offer what is called a "back," over which the latter vaulted into a circle of cheering friends. Bats, balls, tops, marbles, &c. were in profusion, and two or three new boys like myself, who held shyly apart, were the only parties who did not participate in the bustle and the glee.

All this did not harmonise very well with Master Sharpe's dismal revelations. Still, I must own, I could not shake off the feeling they had inspired; more espe-

cially as I observed that after Sharpe had spoken apart to a few of his comrades—probably, as I judged from his gesture, mentioning my name and history—they turned and looked at me in a kind and sympathising manner; while one boy, whose eye I happened to catch, wiped that organ with an expression of genuine regret I could hardly have expected in a stranger.

The two masters, Messrs. Thummles and Boreham, walked affably up and down, each attended by a group of admirers. But the great interest centered in the question—

Was *He* arrived?

If he were, nobody had yet seen him, and the truculent bearing of Queen Mob, as reported by the successive arrivals from the interior, plainly intimated that she was still exercising undivided sway. This might be regarded as an undoubted token, the presence of the terrible master having the effect (in the expressive language of one of the fellows) of doubling that lady up like a garden-stool.

Alarmed and anxious as I felt, there was something contagious in the gaiety of the boys, and after being formally presented to Robert Lindsay (at that time 'junior cock,'—that is, you know, the boy that could lick all the junior division), to Tom Bush, Jack Forster, Ambo Hall, and a lot of others (I won't bother you with their names now, but call them up as I want them), and the acquaintance being inaugurated with an immediate

game of hare and hounds, I began to feel more at home.

After tea, when we had assembled for the evening in the schoolroom, it was found that nearly sixty boys had arrived. The row and hubbub were indescribable. As for me, I attached myself principally to Bobby Sharpe and Ambo Hall; the latter being the kind-hearted boy who cried in the corner of his jacket when Sharpe pointed me out as one of the monster Styles's possible victims. Sharpe, indeed, mixed a good deal with the general crowd, renewing old acquaintances, forming new, dividing cake and sweetmeats, examining bats, &c., and promoting the confusion in every possible way. Several scuffles took place; and at one time there was a general, though friendly, fight, which lasted three quarters of an hour. In that contest I saw Bob Sharpe change sides repeatedly in the most unblushing manner, not apparently with the view of conquering, but, on the contrary, to restore the balance of the fight; for whenever his party prevailed, over went Bob to the enemy.

Though I said the conflict was general, I must except a group, who, without taking any part in it, nevertheless watched its fluctuations with a dignified interest. One individual—a tall and very handsome boy—was seated upon a throne of large books, hastily constructed for him on one of the desks by two or three other big boys, who sat round him at a lower elevation, resting their chins upon their hands, or gravely nodding in acquiescence with certain brief observations occasionally addressed

to them by their chief. Now and then the latter would point to different quarters of the room, and move his hands as though explaining some point of strategy. Master Sharpe afterwards told me that this was no less a person than Harry Maitland,—the senior cock—and that, from a remark he had overheard, Harry had taken advantage of the chance battle to point out to a few friends what, in the event of a school-rising, would be the proper mode of handling masses of boys, as well as of constructing, with desks, forms, &c., an *inner* line of defences, which might be tenable, even after the doors were forced.

The battle subsided—as it commenced—without the slightest reason; and the two masters, who had, for this evening, offered no opposition to the sports, availed themselves of the lull to enter the school, and warn us that bed-time had arrived. We were separated into various parties, and, this night at least, I had no lack of company, there being twenty-three boys, including Sharpe and Hall, in my room.

“Now, boys, no lucifers,” said Mr. Thummles, who superintended the junior division, as he took up the candle to depart. “Mr. Hall, you are captain of the room. I rely on *you*.”

Mr. Hall slipped a match-box into his shoe, and muttered that he would look out, and if it so happened that he saw a light in the room, and was sure it *was* a light, would not fail to report it.

The qualified character of this promise seemed to

excite Mr. Thummles's suspicions. He paused a moment; then went out; but presently reopened the door, and, still holding the handle, began a little lecture:—

“The curfew, or couvre-feu,” said Mr. Thummles, “was, as you are perhaps aware, an institution derived from my—from our Norman forefathers. Intended originally as a safeguard against that devouring element to which its name refers, it dropped into desuetude in consequence of the immense number of conflagrations it gave rise to. *That* circumstance was, no doubt, owing to the reprehensible concealment of tallow-dips—the elaborate dresses of the period rendering it next to impossible to go to bed in the dark.

“It has been very generally imagined that the custom has altogether ceased to exist. Not so. Far from it. Exactly the reverse.

“In the considerable village of Stubbs-Porkington, Hunts, the curfew is regularly rung, in summer at eight o'clock, in winter at six.

“No further notice, I must confess, is taken of it by the inhabitants than consists in certain emphatic interjections levelled at the obstinate old sexton, who receives twelve and ninepence a-year, bequeathed by an eccentric gentleman for the purpose of perpetuating this venerable nuisance.

“And, in a book in my possession, published so recently as eighteen hundred and forty-three, I find it alluded to as though a matter of daily occurrence,—

'Twice eleven is twenty-two—
Methinks I hear the loud *curfew*.'

Gentlemen, good night."

And Mr. Thummles retired.

"He's been lecturing about all the holidays, and that's a bit of the last," said Bobby Sharpe, as the door closed.

The light had not died out of the keyhole before a rival radiance emanated from a distant corner; and presently a blue coruscation lit up the rows of beds.

"Hi, you! Stop that!" said Ambo Hall. "Feign glims, young fellow."

"Bosh! What did you give them to me for?" was the reply.

"Wait till I go to sleep then. You stop, I tell you," said conscientious Ambo.

Out went the light.

To attempt anything like an accurate report of the Babel of conversation that ensued would be useless. A few mingled scraps must suffice. At first everybody talked at once, and I couldn't make out much, but as the voices disentangled themselves I heard such remarks as these:

"Nine new bats in the school already. Hooray!"

"Allfrey's fellows challenge us. Won't they put their foot——"

"I say, you fellows, let's have a jolly good bolst——"

"——test little thing you ever saw, that sister of his; teeth like pearls, and ——"

"A rat-tail—a thing I hate. My governor said he wouldn't give more than ten pounds, and ——"

"Come over, Freddy. I can't hollo it out across the room ——"

"Catch me! *I'm* not in love, you donkey!"

"Hang this row! Give us a song, old Penfold, that'll stop 'em. Sh! Sh!"

"When the rosy morn appearing,
Tips with gold——"

"I wish my uncle would follow the rosy morn's example. He only gives five bob," said Sharpe.

"I say, Lally, how's eggs?"

(Lally Lute—whose real name was Harry Hewit—kept a hen or two, and sold the produce.)

"Something with a chorus, Penfold. Hang the particular words!"

"With a sword upon his brow,
And his helmet by his side,
The soldier mounts his tow-row-row,
To conquer, or to died."

"All stuff, I tell you, crying it up as a wonderful catch. He only stood mid-wicket."

"Hark, Charley, to that Jew, Lute, saying he'll charge three halfpence an egg all through the half!"

"And we're full already at that," squeaked Lally, exultingly, for himself and hens.

"Pitch into him, the nearest young Christian. It's too bad."

"Styles will return to-morrow, I suppose," said a deep but pleasant voice that I had not heard before. The remark, though no one made any direct rejoinder, seemed to command silence, and then concentrate the talk.

"Won't he be savage this half?" said a small voice. "He's lost his dearest friend."

"Old Twittleton. Poor old Twit! He got us a whole holiday once. He was the only man Styles was ever afraid of."

"Has anybody seen the new cane?" said Bobby Sharpe, breaking in. "I'm told he's had it built on purpose—took all the holidays to make."

"It came inside the coach, with Brome Debary. They were the only two passengers. It was packed up like a billiard-cue; and the jarvey, seeing Brome was coming here, asked him to take charge of it! He didn't like to refuse; but he peeped into the case, and it's an awful instrument, bound with copper wire."

"Who's going to be the victim this half?"

"Hush-h!" said Sharpe.

"I bet I know. Debary, and one of the new fellows."

"Which?"

"Hush-h!" said Sharpe, again.

"I should like to hear, please, Sharpe," I put in, humbly. I felt I could not rest till I knew the very worst.

"Well; but don't be down-hearted, my dear old fellow," said Sharpe, affectionately. "Styles does gobble us up occasionally—that's the truth of it; but it don't follow that he should fancy *you*. There's a mystery, as we all know, about the man. You can never be sure of him. But he's not altogether bad. Remorse, they say, is beginning to tell upon him, which shows that he has a conscience. He's ill sometimes, and a little wandering, and then says frightful things—in Greek, the maids tell us. Besides that, he spends an hour every day in the Den of Darkness."

"Den of *what*?"

"Darkness. It's a name we gave to a strange place he has had built in the garden. It's like a tomb; but there's nothing in it, for it was left open till it was completed, and there's nothing but the four bare stone walls. Nobody knows why he goes, or who it is he meets there; but groans and cries, and a voice quite different from *his*, have been heard from within. Five gardeners have left—they couldn't stand it. Nobody goes in with him; and whoever meets him there must naturally come from a very infernal direction. That's all we know. It wouldn't be right to say positively that he's obliged to meet the ghosts of the boys he has killed; but you may draw your own conclusion. It's all very strange,

I know ; and perhaps you don't believe me. Well, ask Forster. Nobody ever doubted him. Forster!"

"What's the row?" inquired the deep voice, drowsily.

"Balfour wants to know about the Den."

"Tell him."

"But he don't believe me."

"That's not my fault."

"Tell him, like a good fellow, isn't it true that Styles passes an hour every day in the Tomb?"

"No."

"Not?"

"There's no more reason for calling it a tomb than my bed the lord-mayor's coach."

"Call it what you please; isn't it a fact that Styles spends an hour daily in a mysterious building *like* a tomb, and that groans and cries, the deuce's own row, are heard issuing from it?"

"All that, Master Balfour," said Forster, "is strictly true. Stop your belief *there*, and allow me to wish you good night."

Sharpe's anxiety to secure Forster's corroboration of his story was grounded on a circumstance that only became known to me at a later period; namely, that he, Forster, exercised a singular influence over the minds of his schoolfellows. Still, strange to say, he wasn't popular. He was cold and reserved in manner, entered little into the amusements of the school, and had no intimate allies, excepting one little chap whom he had, in a very plucky

manner, rescued from some systematic bullying, and kept ever after under his especial protection, lavishing upon *him* all those regards which boys usually distribute with greater impartiality. There was a remarkable witchery in his voice. It was better music to hear him speak than Penfold sing. We thought *this* was the secret of his influence; but, looking back, I judge more clearly. It was *mind*. He had too much of that article to make a popular schoolboy, or perhaps a happy one; but it *told* on those around.

I have stopped in my story to say thus much of him, because he pleased and puzzled me, because he was more morose to me than anybody else, and because, though he shortly left, and I saw him no more, certain am I that the world—if he lives to be a man—will hear more of Jack Forster.

On the occasion I was speaking of, the few words he uttered produced their accustomed effect. My sense accepted them as though an oracle had spoken. I had now heard enough. My poor little head was full of perplexity and fear. At home or at school, alone or in a crowd, it seemed destined that some mysterious terror should darken my way!

The room was silent enough now. The moment Forster's remark had checked the general current of conversation the boys had begun, one by one, to yield to those drowsy influences which steal so lightly and sweetly on the subject of twelve or fourteen; and, in

a very brief space, I must have been the only fellow in the room awake. . . . How wretched I felt! I tried to think whether I had really been a *very* wicked boy, to have a fate so different from every one of those about me. Not one of these sleepers but might be dreaming of friends and home—his blessed mother—his proud, fond governor, affecting carelessness of his half-spoiled boy—his merry little sister—his pony—the old housekeeper, his great ally, that Queen of Cakes and Arbitress of All the Jams. I never had a friend but Bundle—my dear governor, whose affection only awoke when his reason had fallen asleep for ever,—and—and—oh, forgive me!—one more—yes, one more . . . Darling mother, my one sweet remembrance, never mingled in my memory with any less angelic thought—may monstrous phantoms persecute me at their will—and fears, no less tormenting, rob me of needful rest—and will *you* never more, for one blessed instant, reveal your comforting presence to your lonely boy? “Too happy—too happy to heed, or even hear,” I thought, as I lay down, crying bitterly.

But, in truth, the very recollection of my sweet mother never failed to bring composure to my mind—perhaps because with her came ever associated the sense of His love and pity with whom she had found such early refuge. I rose on my knees in the bed, repeated my prayers a second time, then lay down again, and slept.

In the middle of that night I started up, and gazed

into the darkness with a wild and eager curiosity. Something had aroused me. It was like a very faint and distant call, such as might reach the ear from one benighted on a dreary moorland, or come creeping over the heaving sea-plains in a night-calm, from distance hard to be believed.

Straining my sight to the utmost, I discerned a single speck, or point of light. It grew larger and larger, as if passing over an interval of miles, till it revealed the outline of a lustrous figure, clearly defined, yet minute as though seen through a reversed telescope. Still it grew—still grew—who knows out of what illimitable space?—till, in a circle of radiance, round which the darkness closed like a velvet pall, there stood before me, in her perfect, child-like beauty, my mother, my darling mother! I was not startled—not awe-stricken—not even amazed. There was no room in my throbbing heart for anything but joy—deep, grateful, exulting joy. With one glance of the blue remembered eyes she threw me a world of tenderness and pity; then, with a smile, as if inviting me to follow, began to recede. . . . I stole out of bed, trembling with eagerness, yet never for a second removing my eyes from her, lest she should steal away, and leave me again alone.

Along the gallery, down the stairs, into the stone passage, my bare feet sensible of, but not recoiling from, the chill—for I would have trampled ice or fire rather than have stayed that fond pursuit. Suddenly she

paused at one of the recesses I before described—I darted forward; she was gone! For a moment I stood in cold and darkness, then a pleasant warmth . . . a burst of light . . . I awoke!

Where do you think I was?

Sitting in my night-dress, in a huge red-leather chair, before a blazing fire, in a room I had never seen. There was a table with a reading-lamp, books, papers, &c.; and at the opposite side, in an attitude of considerable surprise, an elderly gentleman. His hand rested on a large volume he had been perusing, and one long white finger still marked the passage at which he had been interrupted. He sat so perfectly motionless, that if it had not been for a frown upon his forehead, that passed quite away as we regarded each other, he might have seemed a figure in wax . . . And, the frown gone, what a sad and splendid face it was! “Splendid” may be a strong expression, as applied to male beauty that has weathered sixty winters. *That* I can’t help. Nature’s masterpieces are not usually constructed of the most lasting materials; but here was an exception. He looked like something I had read or dreamed of—never thought to see. A condemned patriot—a fallen statesman—a dethroned king! Saul, at his dreary supper under the witch’s roof, oppressed with the shadow of his coming doom, must have looked as he did. Pity, wonder, and admiration, filled my heart as I sat staring upon him. By “wonder,” I mean

curiosity, as to what terrible grief, what gnawing remorse, or frightful secret, had set that never-changing trouble in his eyes!

At last, confused and dazzled, I began to cry.

"Frightened, my small visitor?" said the gentleman in a kind, pleasant voice. "Sit quiet for a moment, while I finish this page, then tell me how you contrived to find me out in the dark so cleverly."

"My—my mother b—brought me, sir," I replied, with another burst of tears, as I remembered how soon that guiding light had vanished.

"Your mother!—I thought—— Stay, this is hardly fair talking."

He rose with a smile, caught up a large cloak that lay upon a sofa near, looking as if it had been recently flung aside, and threw it around my shivering form, arranging it carefully and tenderly as any nurse. In a few moments I was in a lovely glow.

My companion turned round in his chair and crossed his legs.

"Now you are warm, my boy, and wide awake, tell me what you mean by saying your mother brought you."

"She came to the room, sir, and beckoned me to follow her; and I did, and came here."

"Down those stairs, and along those passages, and select the right door out of so many, and all in the dark, eh?"

"She was light enough," was my brusque reply.

He looked intently at me for some moments, then said:—

"Did you ever hear of little boys walking in their sleep?"

"I did to-night, sir," I replied; "for I remember waking and finding you here, and that I wasn't there, and couldn't remember how I came away from where I am't. But I never shall again."

"How do you know that?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Don't know it?"

"Don't know *how* I know it, sir; but I know I know it."

"Here have I knowing pupil indeed! Are you sure, my boy, that you are not still in the land of dreams?"

"Oh, I hope not! I hope not!"

"Come, no more tears! You come to pay me a visit, and must make yourself agreeable. Why do you so earnestly hope you are not dreaming? My boy, do you know who I am?"

"Yes, I do. Oh— I mean St— that is, Mr. Styles."

"Without the alterations, what is that?"

"Old Styles," I said, looking him in the face.

The face smiled.

"Right, young Balfour; we shall be friends. And, knowing me, you are not frightened—hey?"

"No, sir."

"That is almost more than I dare affirm of myself. You came upon me, boy, at a strange moment."

"Did I open the door of myself, sir?"

"You did. So quietly that I was scarcely aware of your presence till I raised my eyes and saw you seated in that chair with your lips apart, as if uttering the very words I was reading, '*Præsto sum.*'"

"Please, sir, what's that?"

"*'Behold, I am here.'* But I did not call, as did Eli. Are you sent, then? Have you anything to foretell me, strange little messenger? *Oro te ne elaveris me*—Of what am I talking? Do not be alarmed, my boy. I study much, and what I read and muse on mixes sometimes with my words. So, '*Old Styles*'. . . And I have other and more fearful names, no doubt?" questioned my master, accompanying his words with a smile of such winning sweetness, that I would have confessed anything in the whole world, had it been a second gunpowder-plot, and myself the concoctor. Yielding at once to its influence, I sighed out resignedly,—

"Indeed, sir; they do say dreadful things ——" ,
There I stopped.

"Schoolmasters are tyrants by their office. I hope, at least, I am not fiercer than my fellows," said Mr. Styles, laughing encouragingly. "Come, let me know the very, very worst."

"They say that you —that—you —"

I could not go on. The word stuck in my throat.

"Starve—neglect—ill-treat my boys? Go on—
which is it?"

"Worse."

"Worse?"

"They say, sir, that you have"—(I thought I would
somewhat reduce the amount of accusation)—"*killed*
a boy."

If I had shot him, the effect could not have been
greater! He gave a start and shiver. The blood flew
to his face—to his very temples. I shall never forget
the fearful expression of the eye he now bent upon
me, leaning forward as he did so, and gripping the arms
of his chair with a force that seemed to indent the wood.
Another moment, and he fell back powerless, prostrated;
his features working spasmodically, and the
drops of agitation bursting from his brow.

"Killed!" he gasped. "Righteous Heaven! hast
thou more judgment yet?"

He rose with a great effort, and walked, or rather
staggered, feebly through the room. Strong and stately
as he was, his figure swayed and bent in the storm of
mental agony. I sat still, and was not much frightened,
for the simple but not unreasonable thought occurred
to me—"If he is so shocked at the remembrance of
his wicked crime, he won't be likely to repeat it in my
person."

At last he came back, and, sitting down, began to
question me.

"Is this—this thing you speak of—openly talked of among the boys? Children as they are, have they no feeling—no thought—no pity for my ——"

"*Neck!*" thought I, finishing the sentence for him, as he paused, concealing his face in his hands.

"One might have imagined that their warm young hearts would have judged indulgently of such a matter."

I didn't quite see *that!* On the contrary, wasn't it a deal more likely that they might be slightly pre-possessed against a system that might extend to *them*? I was shocked at the mild views this extraordinary man seemed to entertain of homicide, and began to attribute his excessive agitation less to remorse for his guilt than dread of its detection. His next words confirmed that expression.

"How—how do they know? I mean, what grounds have they for believing, far less for asserting, that I have done . . . murder?"

The word was gasped out—almost inaudibly.

As the conversation proceeded, I had rather gained than lost courage; and, determined not to give up my informant's name, if I could help it, I murmured something about the tomb in the garden, and what was overheard there. Perhaps this rather vague evidence somewhat reassured him. No doubt, he remembered that groans and ejaculations—especially when the latter are conveyed in Greek—do not amount to an absolute confession of any special crime. At all events, he re-

covered his composure, and almost his dignity, as he said:—

“Enough, my boy. Tell me who was your companion last night?

I gave up Master Sharpe, without any hesitation.

“So—I guessed as much. And to night? Did all your companions take part in this conversation? Did all confirm what Sharpe said?”

“Nobody contradicted him, sir.”

“Indeed! No one? . . . Does Forster sleep in your room?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And no one contradicted Mr. Sharpe’s accusations? How did you find me here, sir?” said Mr. Styles, very sharply and suddenly, as I have since heard a lawyer attempt to entrap an unwary witness by reverting unexpectedly to a point already disposed of.

“My mother brought me, sir.”

“I believe it, boy.”

Old Styles rose, and lit a small chamber-lamp.

“Now you shall go to bed. Say nothing, and think as little as possible, of this conversation. But to-morrow, after morning school, you and Forster attend me here. We three together will visit the garden-tomb.”

With this cheerful promise, Old Styles lifted me, cloak and all, in his arms, and we proceeded slowly up-stairs. Arrived at Mr. Thummles’s room, he tapped gently, and opening the door, held a brief conference

with that illustrious Norman, the result of which was that the latter presently appeared, wrapped in his dressing-gown. Giving me to his charge, Mr. Styles nodded good-night to us both, and withdrew.

Mr. Thummles then conducted me to my deserted couch. I expected he would have said something, but he didn't. For anything in his deportment he might have been catching somnambulists every night for the last twelvemonth. He saw me comfortably in bed, stood over me for a moment, as if he had been saying grace, yawned, winked, and departed.

He seemed hardly to have been absent a moment before he was again at my bedside. But it was now broad day, the room was all bustle and commotion, the boys were getting up. Styles, it appeared, had notified his arrival, and "hoped" to meet his young friends in the schoolroom in half an hour. As it was not thought prudent to disappoint him, we had all assembled within that time, and now numbered about seventy. A general hush prevailed, nobody speaking above his breath, and all awaiting, as it seemed, with considerable anxiety, the appearance of the dreaded master.

Meanwhile, contrary to Mr. Styles's injunctions, I had been doing my utmost to recall every incident of the preceding night. My recollection, however, was a good deal confused, and I had so much difficulty in persuading myself that it was not all a dream, that I should scarcely have been surprised had a very different person from

him I had conversed with entered the room in the character of Styles.

But it was all right. There was no delusion in the case. As the clock struck seven, the same stately figure I had seen came quietly in at a side-door and sat down at a desk placed upon a low platform at one end of the room. He was presently followed by three slim individuals, who sauntered slowly in, as if they had called to pay a morning visit, and placed themselves at a small table in the vicinity of the master. These, as I afterwards discovered, were parlour-boarders—venerable creatures of seventeen or eighteen, who, in deference to their years and infirmities (and an additional forty pounds a-year) were allowed chairs in school, silver forks, and gravy at dinner, the privilege of sleeping in three little cells all alone by themselves—which must have been immense fun, let alone the dignity—and the right of making mock-love to Queen Mob whenever Styles's back was turned, which seemed to be the poor chaps' sole amusement.

The master had taken his place so silently, that a great portion of the school did not observe it until the entrance of his three followers attracted general attention to that part of the room. No sooner was he recognised in the accustomed chair, than a murmur of acclamation, spreading like lightning from desk to desk, swelled in an instant to a general shout. The entire school, as by a simultaneous impulse, started to their feet, and three

such cheers as I have never heard before or since shook the very plaster from the walls.

Styles rose and came forward.

Upon this, the boys, to my astonishment, quitted their places, and crowded round him with the most cordial and familiar expression of joy; those who could get near enough, shaking his extended hands; those outside, cheering, dancing, and indulging in a regular orgy of delight. Even the three venerable young men at the table, in deference to the prevailing enthusiasm, rose to their feet, and viewed the scene with contemptuous but indulgent pity.

And this was the tyrant! the torturer! the murderer! Either these boys were most accomplished sycophants, or Master Robert Sharpe was the greatest of living humbugs. But then, the interview last night! Styles's own conduct—almost confession! What—what could it all mean?

It was several minutes before the joyful confusion subsided, and the chaps resumed their seats. Even then there occurred frequent little bursts of excitement (especially among the juniors), which it required all Mr. Thummles's authority to repress. At last, however, silence and order were re-established, and business began.

This morning was spent chiefly in making a fresh division of the classes,—of which there were five. A tall, red-haired youth, of plodding and persevering

habits—Alec McBinkie by name—was at the top of the school; and I decline to specify the precise individual who was at the bottom. Some yellow books, looking horribly hard and new—and to the last degree uninteresting—were handed to me, and, in company with seven other little victims, I was directed to begin at once the ascent of that classic eminence, the first step whereof is on the Latin grammar; the second, a vile author, who, very naturally ashamed of his real name, has been abhorred by later ages under that of “*Delectus*,” and the third a gentleman named Entropius, the sole object of whose lucubrations seems to have been the persecution of innocent schoolboys throughout all time. Beyond *him* all was gloom and terror. Doubtless that classic mountain *had* an apex. I never reached it. And if I had, I dare say it would have been much like climbing Etna, Mont Blanc, and their kindred hillocks: you mount to the top at the cost of immense labour, only to find that you have got into an unbreathable atmosphere.

During the morning Styles called up many boys by name, holding little cheerful chats, and sending them back chuckling and delighted. He inquired minutely into the prospects of the half, as regards cricket—he chaffed Lally Lute about his Cochin-Chinas—he expressed some curiosity as to who was junior cock this half—but shook his head warningly, when an officious chap, thinking to please him, hinted at the possibility of

a well-matched contest for that dignity. He exhibited, in short, a surprising acquaintance with the habits of thought, as well as the objects and amusements of the boys; and it became every moment more obvious to me that he possessed their affections, however he had come by them.

Of me, individually, he had taken no notice whatever. But at twelve o'clock, when the school rose, and he had announced, amidst renewed cheers, that the remainder of that day would be a holiday—a signal I could not misunderstand brought me to his side. There I stood for some moments, without receiving any further notice. He was leaning over his desk in a thoughtful manner—waiting, possibly, till the school-room was abandoned by everybody but ourselves—for, as the last boy disappeared, he turned and laid his hand on my shoulder.

“Youngest of my boys,” he said, with a sad half-smile, “and perhaps not the wisest, you have taught your master a lesson he must not despise. . . . I cannot tell whether for your own sake—for mine—or for both—you were impelled, sleeping or waking, to visit me in the dead silent night, and announce to me that my guilt and grief were known. . . . You say you were guided to me in a dream. My boy, I have not for thirty years studied children’s faces to doubt what yours so plainly corroborates. That dream was not sent in vain. It has an end to be accomplished, and it matters little that

you yourself are unconscious of the purpose. You are but the tablet on which the command is written."

I stood with my eyes fixed upon him, trying with all my might to follow his meaning.

"I am persuaded that the moment has arrived, when I should no longer conceal from any human creature whom the warning may profit, the crime of my life, and its attendant unavailing remorse. I cannot otherwise interpret our strange meeting, and the circumstance that I should be indebted to an infant like you for the knowledge that I am regarded as an—assassin! and that the cheers you have heard me greeted with are not the result of affection, but of *fear*."

His face changed, and his voice shook with emotion, as he uttered the last words; but he recovered himself and went on:—

"I told you last night, you should know the secret of the garden-tomb. Come with me now, and learn it. And, because you are but a little mouthpiece to relate again, as you must do, so sad and solemn a history, I will give you a companion, whose account will confirm yours, and be readily believed. Go, now, and bring Mr. Forster to me. I will wait you here."

Off I hurried to the playground. A cricket-match was already in progress; but Forster was sitting apart on the grass, deep in a great brown, ragged book, lettered "*Spenser's Faerie Queen*."

He looked surprised enough when I delivered

Styles's message, and, in a little verbal postscript of my own, prepared him for what we were about to do. He did not say anything, however, but quietly shut his book, and accompanied me back to the school.

We found Styles writing at his desk—writing so composedly, that I could not help fancying, in my own secret soul, that he tried to put on the appearance of an indifference he was far from feeling. Last night the very remembrance of the crime he was now about to confess, threw him into an agitation fearful to behold. *Now*, as he laid aside his papers, and rose with perfect self-possession, and perhaps a little more dignity than he had yet displayed, he looked more like judge than criminal. Forster appeared to share my impressions; for his manner showed unaffected respect as we followed our master from the room, and, after passing through a courtyard, entered the private garden.

It was a very pretty but terribly neglected garden—like a romping rustic beauty with her hair out of curl, and her bodice torn—and seemed certainly to corroborate Master Sharpe's assertion, as to the difficulty of retaining the services of any gardener for a lengthened period. The weeds—the fastest growers—would have had it all their own way, if here and there a noble rose-tree had not shaken herself free from the rank insurgents, and, with a few stout sunflowers and hardy hollyhocks, insisted that it was a garden still, despite appearances. It must have been the very paradise of snails and

caterpillars; and the size of the garden-spiders was ridiculous!

There were some fine old ilex and sycamores, and several shaded walks, entirely carpeted with rich green moss. Down one of these Mr. Styles turned—probably from habit—for the mysterious tomb, or Den of Darkness, as the chaps called it, was not concealed in these remoter shades, but stood at the farther end of a broad gravel terrace, directly fronting the entrance-gate.

It was a lovely, quiet day; but, though we could not detect the motion of a leaf, there was a soft "susurrus" (beautiful word!) overhead, as though the trees were talking, below their breaths, of what was passing underneath; and in the centre of a dark bower of briony there was seated a nightingale in full trill. "*Tiou—tiou—tiou—koui—koui—trrrrrrrzt,*" said the nightingale, and stopped suddenly—a trembling in the bush betraying where the cunning little chantress had concealed herself, watching till we had safely passed.

The first bend of the path brought us again within sight of the tomb. I will own that my heart beat a little quicker as we approached it. I looked at Forster. *He* was looking intently at Styles; but I could glean nothing from his quiet face, and now we stood beside the mysterious building.

It was of Portland granite, and had the appearance of a little chapel, with a door and two small lozenge-shaped windows. Styles took a key from his pocket;

and, opening the door, entered, signing to us to follow.

We stood within four bare stone walls. In the centre was a raised object, covered with a sheet, or pall, of some unbleached material, whose yellowish folds looked as if they themselves had been sculptured in stone. After a moment's pause, Styles drew the covering aside

I started back in horror, and so suddenly as nearly to upset Forster, who was looking over my head. But you won't be surprised, when I tell you that the removal of the pall had disclosed an inanimate body. It was that of a youth about eighteen. Never—at that period of my life—had I seen anything half so beautiful in humanity. He lay upon his back, the head inclined sideways, as one in sleep; and with a happy smile playing round the parted lips, as if he were in the depth of a delicious dream. He was wrapped in a blue mantle, which surged up in ample waves around, leaving, however, the neck and bosom bare. On the latter, in the region of the heart, was a blueish mark, scarcely bigger than an asp's bite, but no less deadly.

Though evidently without life, none of the usual tokens of the great change were visible in the youth's face. His features were not pinched or sharpened; the smooth square brow retained its fulness, the small blue veins seemed still pulsing with a living tide. There was, moreover, red in the cheek; and, unless my sight deceived me (for I had now recovered courage, and

could gaze steadily on what was before me), the long eyelashes quivered and the nostril dilated, exactly as in sleep!

So fascinated had I become by this strange thing—the beautiful dead-living boy—the victim of a violent end, yet, to all appearance, in a healthful sleep that it required an effort to remove my eyes. When I did so, Mr. Styles had changed his position and attitude, so that his face, and that of the corpse, were in close propinquity. I saw Forster's eye glance quickly from one to the other, and back again. Yes. There could be no mistaking it. They *had* been father and son

There was a brief inscription, in a strange tongue. I knew no Latin, then, or my surmise might have derived confirmation from that most touching lament ever wrung from a parent's heart:—

“Fili mi Absalom—Absalom fili mi!
Quis mihi tribuat, ut ego moriar pro te—
Absalom fili mi—fili mi Absalom?”

Suddenly, Mr. Styles, who had hitherto appeared scarcely conscious of our presence, raised his head, and beckoned us to approach nearer. Forster did so, unhesitatingly I followed; and then, to my amazement, not to say relief, perceived that the apparent corpse—mantle and all—was nothing more or less than a superbly-executed sculpture, which had been, in addition,

so delicately tinted with the hues of life as to make it impossible, at the distance of a few feet, to detect the masterly deception!

The fine chisel, which, as Leontes truly observes, cannot quite "cut breath," had here done everything short of it. You may perhaps have visited Madame Tussaud's wax-work, and are picturing to yourself something like her very finest specimen! Forget her. It was no more like that dreary mass of gaudy, ghastly rigidity—those revolting burlesques of defunct dandies and ogre-faced assassins—than silk is like sackcloth. The colours, laid on with an art beyond my power to describe, were those of absolute life; while the granulated surface of the stone contributed to impart a motive expression not obtainable under other circumstances.

"Here, boys," said our master, "is the companion of my retirement. You see how little there is to wonder at or fear. This image wounds none but him who designed it. Even *thus* he looked on the day this crime was consummated; and thus *will* he look, when, at the day of retribution, his blood may be required at this hand"

His voice trembled for a moment, but he had evidently nerved himself for an effort, and proceeded:—

"I was married and widowed in the same year.

"When the mother of this boy lay dying in my arms, she sought a promise of me. I was a sterner man then—a cold, reserved, and sullen student; one who

had never known a sentiment or passion upon earth, but that which spent itself upon the idol I was about to lose.

"The thing she asked appeared trifling, indeed, to the love that would have dared impossibilities rather than refuse. She charged me, as our child grew up, to be for her sake a tender and indulgent parent; to relax somewhat the rigour and severity which were natural to my disposition; in short, to combine a mother's gentleness with a father's authority, and attach my son to me rather by the bonds of gratitude and affection than those of barren duty.

"I redeemed my promise only too effectually. The child grew up, beautiful as you see, or rather, as you cannot see; for neither sculptor nor artist can reproduce more than a senseless image. I loved him strangely; yet, always mistrustful of my own temper, and haunted with a perpetual dread that I might fall short of the pledge I had given, I set no limits to my affection, and thus passed into the opposite extreme. Indulgence became a habit with me. I checked and thwarted him in no desire; thus daily weakening the authority it grew more and more difficult—yet more and more needful—to assert.

"As my son approached towards man's estate, and was more exempted from such control as I yet exercised, the fruits of my pernicious laxity became apparent. Careless in his choice of associates, he grew familiarised

with a low standard of morality, and too soon exemplified the force of evil example.

"Still, with guilty blindness, I offered such feeble remonstrance as only tended to augment the ill. The poor boy might have argued, that if such an amount of irregularity called down no greater rebuke from a parent than that *I* had administered, a very slight reform might satisfy the conscience of both.

"It was during his second term at college that he became intimate with a set of young men, most of them his senior in years, and *all* ten times older in vice. I will not trace step by step the progress of his fall. He became involved in a maze of debt and difficulty, from which my means were utterly inadequate to extricate him. Indeed, the whole party were similarly circumstanced. Those who were the chief sufferers by their reckless extravagance made common cause against them. A disgraceful exposure was impending, when an opportunity seemed to offer itself of redeeming all.

"A new associate had lately been admitted to their circle. He was the only son of a manufacturer in one of the midland counties; a man whose wealth might be reckoned by millions. This youth, gay, weak, and utterly without experience, they resolved to make their victim—wine and play being the instruments by which they hoped to work out their nefarious ends.

"In this conspiracy my son had no voluntary share. While, with the freemasonry of guilt, the plotters com-

prehended each other's plan and object, almost without the exchange of a word, my boy, less corrupted, saw nothing in preparation beyond an accustomed revel, and actually offered his own apartments for the entertainment, at which the plan was to take effect.

"It is quite possible the rest imagined that his ignorance was feigned, and relied as fully upon his co-operation as that of any other of the party. If so, they were quickly undeceived. No sooner did the first suspicion of what was in progress cross his mind, than he started up, and declared the play at an end. But the conspirators were in the full tide of success—the victim himself eager to continue,—and the determined opposition of one whom they had regarded as an accomplice raised their fury to the utmost. A fearful quarrel ensued, in the course of which one man—the worst of the set, the son of a pauper earl—struck my son twice in the face, and flung him with savage passion to the ground.

"Two days after this occurrence I received a letter from him, detailing the whole unhappy history. In it he confessed the errors of his life—thanking me for my affection and indulgence, acknowledging his misuse of them, and lamenting that he had not exercised a wiser discretion in the choice of his pursuits and friends. I need not tell you that every grateful word was a new stab to my already awakened conscience.

"The poor boy ended by entreating my forgiveness

for the last unworthy act he purposed, knowingly, to commit. He had challenged the ruffian who had outraged him, and the meeting was to take place within half-an-hour.

"I said, children, that I would confess all. I tell you, then, to my shame, that anxiety for my son's safety was not unmingled with a savage satisfaction that so gross and open an injury might not pass unavenged. I reflected—hesitated—felt almost thankful (God forgive me!) that the point seemed to be decided for me, and that any interference on my part must inevitably come too late.

"Still, tormented almost beyond endurance with conflicting emotions, I wandered restlessly about; and at last, finding myself in the study, sank down into my chair, and, almost mechanically, opened a volume that lay before me.

"My eyes fell upon a passage—I was reading it last night, when you, Philip Balfour, surprised me with a visit; and every night I read it:—

'And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.'

'And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die, both of them.'

"Then I remembered why this judgment had come

upon unhappy Eli — because, more mindful of his children than of his God, his sons 'had made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.'

"I started from my seat; for now, indeed, the anguish of suspense had become intolerable. I could not avert God's judgment. At least, I could *learn* it In a few minutes, I was speeding along the road fast as horses could travel.

"Let me conclude the story. Already you know the result, but not all the causes of my remorse and self-reproach. I arrived but an hour too late. The first meeting had been interrupted; and it was only after an interval of many hours that the second was arranged, which terminated—as you see Had I but used those precious moments as a parent should—according to the warning mercifully given—I should not now have been doubly the murderer of my son; first, by giving him up uncontrolledly to the vilest companionship—then, by listening to the voice of my own selfishness and pride, when I should have flown to the rescue, under Providence, both of body and of soul.

"Who shall say I am not this boy's assassin?" concluded the unhappy speaker, in a raised voice, the strange troubled gleam I had before noticed returning into his eyes. Hitherto he had spoken almost calmly. "They are fools or flatterers that say so. I will not be deluded into a mock tranquillity. Here is my remembrancer, my record, and my chronicle. Is it not nobly

done? Ah, he is indeed a cunning workman that wrought it! It cost him years of labour . . . and he, and I, and you, alone have seen this treasure. Here I spend an hour daily, passing to and fro through that neglected garden, which is the fittest symbol of the beautiful mind *I* gave to waste and ruin. Farewell, for another day"—(he added, as he drew the mantle, reluctantly, as it seemed, over the beautiful sculpture). "Go, my boys; I have yet some minutes to remain. You have heard the history, and will remember it."

As we walked slowly back through the melancholy garden, Forster proposed that we should rest a little while on one of the shaded seats. I was glad of that. I liked it better than the playground. So down we sat, and talked about Old Styles.

I've always thought that my schoolfellow had some previous inkling of the real story. As far as *I* was concerned, the narrative seemed somehow to strip away at once every mysterious and terrible attribute with which my fancy—guided by Master Sharpe—had invested Styles. My companion's conversation completed the cure. In a kind, half-bantering tone, he pointed out the profound absurdity of the stuff to which I had surrendered my judgment—(Heaven help us, however! The judgment of *nine*! But, perhaps, even at such years,

A little flattery sometimes does well.)

He proved to me by the rules of reason and common sense, as well as by appeals to his own experience during a stay of three years at Styles's, that the tales I had listened to had as much authenticity as Jack and the Bean-stalk, or Riquet with the Tuft, and laughed heartily at the conduct of my friend, the waiter at the Talbot, which he could only attribute to an illiberal description of the school-dinners from the mouth of some home-bound youth, bent on hoaxing the good-natured man. Forster assured me, that the demonstrations of regard for the master that I had witnessed on his appearance in the schoolroom, were both sincere and unpremeditated; that he was, in very truth, the idol of the boys; and, in short, to speak frankly, anybody who said otherwise must be either a donkey or a liar.

I quitted that garden with Forster, a much happier boy than I entered it. The dreaded tyrant was transformed into a kind and gentle being, with strong sensibilities painfully wrought upon, almost to the limit of reason, by the crowning sorrow of his life, and thus engaging our sympathies at the same time that he commanded our respect.

We went to the playground and told our story. If I had had any doubt remaining as to the attachment of the boys to our singular master, it would have been removed by the manner in which our narrative was received. Play was suspended for the rest of the day, and it looked more like a mourning than a holiday. I

think Mr. Styles understood this, and why no loud voices and rushing feet disturbed his melancholy thoughts on that, the first day of his revisiting the garden-tomb.

Now, my dear Miss May, you will be pleased to remember that it never has been my intention to bore you with a regular autobiography. I told you so, didn't I? and if I didn't, I meant it. It would be no great fun for you to hear what a lot of boys did and said in a general way for a twelvemonth or so, which is the period over which I wish to be allowed to pass, without pausing longer than to mention certain small things that happened in the interval.

Such as:—

I got through that half year very pleasantly upon the whole. At the end thereof my stepmother intimated that she would waive the pleasure of my company at home, and authorised my acceptance of the invitation of a schoolfellow, Freddy Prowett, to spend the holidays with him. And it was very jolly!

Bobby Sharpe—barring the crams he was always telling—turned out a very good fellow. You'd have liked him. It was *he* told me what I read to you about ghosts having always something to do with the lining of your stomach, you know. I was sorry when he went away.

The two masters both left at the end of the half—Mr. Boreham to be married. She was a dressmaker. We knew all about it, and assisted to the utmost,

writing nearly fifty love-letters in the style and in the name of Mr. B., which must have been a source of considerable amusement to him, if, after their union, the lady took it into her head to produce the wooing correspondence.

I have already presented certain of my schoolfellows to you, Miss May. I wish to introduce a few more; but it will perhaps save trouble to call them up as I want them.

I will therefore only mention that I passed the second holidays with another fellow—dear old Ambo Hall; and it was in my third half that a very strange thing happened.

Yes, Miss May, many curious things occurred in the four years I passed at Old Styles's; but perhaps the rummest go of all, was that business of the girl with the yellow-black eyes! What do you think of a whole school, seventy-three fellows, nine day pupils, and three G. P. B.'s (that is, gentlemen parlour-boarders—we gave them the name because they were so cheeky)—what do you think of all these being left to the entire control of a girl of nineteen, managed by her single hand?

And a precious tight one it proved. You just wait.

Dear Old Styles, I must tell you, was sometimes seriously ill, and quite incapable, at such times, of taking any part, however trifling, in the management of the school. It was some—what do you call it?—cerebral

affection, originally induced by over-study at college; and it recurred, at intervals, throughout his life. Nothing but complete repose availed him during the continuance of these attacks, which sometimes lasted only for a day or two, when again he was as well as ever. This state of things was, of course, well known to the fellows' governors and friends; but such was Styles's reputation as a scholar, and maker of scholars, that it did no damage to the school, which was always chock-full, and chaps waiting to get in.

When Styles was laid up, business was hustled on, somehow, in a muddled way, by two resident under-masters, a daily French one, and Queen Mob.

Other visitors than this latter lady—though for shorter periods—not unfrequently appeared at Styles's. He was, we heard, a capital host; and the G. P. B.'s, who were sometimes honoured with invitations to the nine-o'clock suppers, came away highly pleased with their entertainment.

Styles always gave his visitors the choice of dining in the school or the study; and we generally found, especially when they happened to be of the more curious sex, that they preferred the former, in which case they sat at the top of the table, with Styles, Queen Mob, and the senior master, and had all sorts of jolly little things, that made our boiled mutton, and rice pudding with a dab of salt butter upon it, look rather queer. Our banquets were of Queen Mob's invention (anything was

good enough for a schoolboy!), and Styles never interposed in any domestic details, being, to do him justice, utterly indifferent as to what was provided for himself.

It's my belief some of us would have been starved in Queen Mob's time, if it hadn't been for "Will's basket."

Will was a superannuated servitor of the establishment, who was permitted to retain—in private life—the privilege of purchasing stale cakes and mouldyish fruit-pies at a shop in the town, and retailing them in the school, at the cost to the buyer of two hundred and fifty per cent and a stomach-ache.

Now, let me see. I think it was in the third or fourth half of my stay at the school, that there arrived a very mysterious visitor—a lady. She came, intending to pass a considerable time; that we knew, for she brought with her a whole lot of boxes, a large case of books, a harp, and a Newfoundland dog, which faithful and ferocious animal informed us, through the medium of his collar, that his mistress was Mary Percival.

"Mary Percival!" Delicious name! She *must* be young and beautiful. We saw her clogs. They were about the length of one's middle finger! Out of these articles alone we conjured up a glorious ideal. About two-and-twenty, (boys' loves are always advanced in years,) with small, chiselled features, like a Grecian goddess, waves of silken hair, and so forth. It was a singular circumstance (as some one afterwards remarked)

that we could arrive at no definite understanding with regard to her eyes. Everybody was positive,—would have staked his existence—as to what they were *not*. They were neither black, blue, hazel, pink, green, nor grey; not large, nor small, nor long, nor round, nor anything that imagination could devise. We settled every other feature. The eyes beat us. What, then, *were* they? *Had* she eyes? Of course. There were her books, and her harp, to prove it. We had to leave the point unsettled.

Lots were solemnly drawn, in order to decide who should be in love with Mary Percival, and the two longest happening (as Mickey Creagh, who held them, announced) to be of the same length, this lucky circumstance became the parent of one of the prettiest fights of the half, the result being that the unconscious damsel fell to the lot of Boss Twigge, the son of a London alderman, a big hulking fellow of the upper school, who immediately cut the initials "M. P." inside the lid of his desk, and became hopelessly enslaved.

Eagerly was the next dinner-hour anticipated, for not a doubt visited the mind of anybody that the mysterious beauty would show. We were disappointed. Styles and Queen Mob appeared as usual; not so Mary Percival. She never *did* come; and but for having noticed the arrival of her luggage, and occasionally seeing a minute portion of dinner, such as you might offer to a pining dicky-bird, sent carefully up, before

anybody else was helped, we mightn't have known that she was in the house.

Soon, however, strange, sometimes contradictory, rumours crept into circulation, having reference alike to the person, character, and general habits of the beautiful recluse. Nobody had actually set eyes upon her. It was thought that Queen Mob, and a stolid maid from Northumberland, who could speak nothing but her natural burr, and was forbidden to discourse in *that*, were the only parties admitted to her presence.

The barriers opposed to our curiosity had the accustomed effect of quickening the same, and already the matter became tinged with the delightful hue of romance. Mary Percival was forthwith promoted to the position of an enchanted princess, held in thrall by a wicked old fairy (Queen Mob), who was aunt to a weak, but well-meaning monarch (Styles), who, engaged in occult studies, had, with inconceivable stupidity for so gifted a man, left the affairs of his house and kingdom entirely to the control of the aged and malevolent relative in question. Plots were laid for the emancipation of the distressed princess, and we even went the length of taunting Boss Twigge for not attempting something on behalf of his lady. Boss, however, peremptorily declined.

This mode of treating the matter, though it amused, did not satisfy us; and some of the more practical individuals among us resolved to trace out the mystery.

Charley Lysons, of the lower school—who was rather a pet of Queen Mob's—took courage to question that lady on the subject of the strange inmate, but encountered such a rebuff as effectually stopped any further investigations in *that* quarter.

Better success attended a combined assault upon the fidelity of a small kitchen-maid, with whom we sometimes exchanged gestures of passionate attachment, as she passed to and fro across an area commanded by the playground. From her we learnt by degrees that Mary Percival was a reality, a living creature, a woman, a lady—and a young one. One by one, the mysterious attributes with which we had invested her were, by Hester Moggs, quietly stripped away. Her beauty, however, remained. Fact, or fiction, could not injure that. Hester Moggs's utmost eloquence could not vulgarise the little perfect mouth, the even, glistening teeth, the dimpled chin.

“But the eyes, Hester—how about the eyes?”

Hester assumed a look of horror, and sniffed.

“Now, don't be silly, child”—the speaker was twelve, and Hester five-and-twenty—“tell us about the eyes—the eyes! Oh, Hester, don't go, darling Hester—here's a ribb——”

Hang the girl! She was always hearing missis!

So, gradually, the secret narrowed itself to one feature. About this there could be no longer any question—

There was something odd about Mary Percival's eyes!

This conclusion arrived at, curiosity rose to fever-pitch. We put in practice every possible means to gratify it, taking infinitely more pains than you would believe possible, if you have never observed how a mystery grows by discussion into something grand and marvellous. We cultivated the G. P. B.'s, who were, or pretended to be, as ignorant as ourselves—we made deputations to Styles, asking for impossible holidays—we watched the window of the mysterious princess, visible from one side of the playground, every day for hours, relieving guard like sentinels, and reporting such faint indications of a living occupancy as had been observed during the expiring watch. These, to be sure, were meagre enough. There were, however, two little rose-trees, in pots, placed upon the window-sill. The "princess" (as we got to call her) tended these herself; and, on more than one occasion, a hand so small, so white, so graceful, as almost to drive the more susceptible of her admirers frantic, glistened out from behind the window-curtains, plucked a decayed leaf, or clipped a flower, and shot back like a frightened dove.

At last, after five weeks' expectation and conjecture, our impatience was partially rewarded.

One beautiful evening in the middle of August, it happened that the whole school went out for a walk. Even the G. P. B.'s honoured the procession, walking, however, a little aloof—as became them—from the

jacketed throng, their long-tailed coats and high-heeled Bluchers (constructed to look like Wellingtons) forming objects of overt ridicule and secret envy to those who followed.

One lucky chap was left at home—Me. I had got into a row for pitching into Bartle Goldsmidt—an impudent young Hebrew, who shot a pellet into my eye in school. The smart threw me off my guard, and bang went my Gradus at Bartle's head! Styles didn't much mind fighting at proper times, but he objected to it in school hours, as interfering with study; so we were both caned, Bartle was sent to bed, and I was detained from the evening walk, and consoled myself with the "Castle of Otranto."

There were some tamarisk-bushes at the end of the playground, just enough to make a comfortable arbour for any fellow who didn't mind crouching on the ground at their roots; and under one of these I was lying, reading, when the odd thing happened that I'm going to tell you.

I had just got to—

" 'Alas! thou mistakest,' said Matilda, sighing; 'I am Manfred's daughter; but no danger awaits me.' "

" 'Amazement!' said Theodore; 'but last night I blessed myself for yielding thee the service thy gracious compassion so charitably returns me now.' "

" 'Still thou art in an error,' said the princess; 'but this is no time for explanation. Fly, virtuous youth.' "

Suddenly, the distant voice of Styles interrupted the passionate dialogue. My heart stood still. The "Castle of Otranto" was a proscribed work. Silence, however, succeeded, and I eagerly resumed:—

"A deep and hollow groan startled the princess and Theodore.

" 'Confusion! we are overheard!' said the princess.

"They listened, but perceiving no further noise, they both concluded it the effect of pent-up vapours; and the princess carried Theodore"—(how, I thought, *could* he permit it?)—"to her father's armoury, where, equipping him with a complete suit, he was conducted by Matilda to the postern gate.

" 'Avoid the town,' said the princess.

"Theodore flung himself at her feet, and, seizing her lily hand, which with struggles she suffered him to kiss, he vowed on the earliest opportunity to——get himself knighted!"

I had just reached this amazing climax, when again the voice of Styles came upon the breeze. Carefully putting aside the sprays of my tamarisk, I peeped through. What do you think I saw?

Styles—and Mary Percival!

Yes, the beautiful princess, wearied at last of her bower, was coolly walking down the playground by the master's side—not leaning on his arm, though—no! I saw directly *she* wasn't of the leaning sort. I hate describing people, especially women, more particularly

pretty women, and I can't *this*. I can better tell you what she was not. She wasn't tall, that is, not above the middle height; she wasn't a bit like Queen Mob; she had nothing angular about her; every line was sweeping, rounded, and graceful; she had the daintiest little foot, and this she set upon the ground with what some of you poet chaps would call an "expression." It said just as plainly as you can speak, "Here I choose to step, let the whole world oppose me."

She had splendid dark hair, arranged in a deep band upon her white neck. The face, as far as it could be seen, exceeded our most romantic dreams; chin, mouth, and half the cheek and nose were visible enough, but, round the brow she wore a curious broad fillet, made like the half-mask worn by harlequins. She wasn't blindfolded, you understand. There were large circular holes cut for the eyes, and round these were, first a crimson, then a yellow, rim, imparting a ghastly and horrible expression, such as it is impossible to describe.

She walked with her little head inclined forward, and her white hands clasped tight together, something in the attitude of the adoring saints in a picture.

Not having seen me go down the playground, they no doubt believed it wholly deserted, and came slowly on, turning mechanically when they reached the tamarisks, instead of coming round, yet passing so close that the princess's light dress brushed the sprays. Styles was reading to her in a low, earnest voice. And what

do you think it was? A Greek play! It's as true as I sit here. The "Alcestis" of Euripides.

I was rather forward in Greek, and I knew what he was saying. I won't bother you with the Greek, but my crib gives it thus:—

Herc. Surely thy wife, Alcestis, is not dead?

Admet. There is a twofold tale to tell of her.

Herc. But do you speak of her as dead or living?

Admet. *She is—and she is not—and I am wretched.*

The princess clasped her hands to her masked face, like one in agony, though I imagined she was only bored; for how should she know anything of Euripides? and they passed out of hearing.

The mysteries of Otranto were fading into nothing. It was, after all, only the ghost of a romance. Here was the real thing. Was the fillet a disguise? But how strange! how incomplete! how likely to attract the very notice and inquiry she desired to shun! or was it to conceal some defect too horrible? — Here they approached again. Styles had ceased reading, and both moved sadly and silently onward, buried in thought. To my immense consternation they did not turn off as before, but, pursuing the path, came round my ambush, and were upon me!

The princess started and stopped. Styles caught me by the collar. I didn't care. I was only in the playground, where I had a right to be; and Styles himself was out of bounds, if anybody was.

The jolly old chap knew *that* as well as I did; so he didn't box my ears, but his eye fell upon the corner of the book I had tried to hide under my jacket. He made a spiteful snatch at it, looked at it with an intense disgust, far from complimentary to the distinguished author, and put it in his pocket. Then he seized me by the arm.

"Now, pledge me your word, sir," he began —

But the princess quietly interposed:—

"It is useless, my good friend; let him go."

Styles obeyed; and wasn't I off like a shot? And wasn't it jolly that I had had to make no promises, and might relate my adventure the moment the fellows returned? which I did.

As though the princess knew that her remarkable appearance would be no longer a secret, or else because she was weary of her solitary room, or the society of Queen Mob, the very next day, and every succeeding one, she came down and dined with the school, still wearing her hideous mask, and regarded with mingled feelings of awe, suspicion, and admiration. The idea that such a creature was really hiding from justice, met with little credence; and the general, and certainly the most reasonable, impression was, that the hateful black fillet concealed some deformity even more repulsive than itself. She appeared, however, on all occasions perfectly at her ease, and used to gaze down the long table in a cool, superior way, as though taking in the charac-

ters of the chaps; sometimes allowing her look to rest upon particular individuals long enough to make the said parties wince and shuffle uncomfortably, as if they were pricked.

In this silent manner, we felt sure, she made the acquaintance of at least *four* fellows, namely, Harry Maitland, Charley Lysons, Looby Weekes, and Philip Balfour—(*me*).

Harry Maitland was, at that time, senior cock, and very nearly at the top of the school. The best fellow in it, full of life and frolic, and a great favourite of Styles's; short silky hair, curling naturally, clear brown eyes—it's just one of those few faces one can recall at any distance of time—poor old Harry!

Charley Lysons was a mischievous little imp of the lower school—up to anything, and always in a row.

Looby Weekes—I forget his Christian name—I don't think he knew it himself. Having been told, on his first appearance at Styles's, that he would be licked if he ever called himself anything but "Looby," he had got the habit of it, and even signed his exercises "L. Weekes." He was one of the biggest boys (and asses) in the school. I know you won't believe it, but that fellow was still in Corderius and Whitaker; nothing inspired him or quickened his apprehension; you might as well have caned the stump of a tree. Styles gave it up, after a few months, and, finding it useless to instruct

him, made him a kind of bridge for others. Looby was thenceforth charged with the duty of bringing up fellows for punishment, and holding them, if necessary, during its infliction. This was not of frequent occurrence. Styles hated punishment, regarding it as an unseemly interruption to the pursuit of the learning he delighted in. But when he *was* provoked, you didn't forget it in a hurry! Thus the call of "Mr. Weekes," echoing through the vaulted room, has made many a chap's heart give a quicker jump; for no one was ever guilty of the absurdity of believing that Mr. Weekes was needed for any purpose tending to his own instruction!

I myself was the last of the four that seemed to attract the especial notice of the mysterious princess, and that was probably because she had seen me before; —or was it that she had a spite against me for telling of her? At all events, I didn't feel happy under her gaze. Happy! I would positively have dived under the table to escape it! I'm sure she saw this, and visited me with those fearful eyes twice as much as anybody else. Just like women, bother them!

About this period of the half there was a good deal of agitation in the school, originating in another matter, of a less mysterious kind.—I refer to the dinners. Queen Mob had taken it into her head that bullocks' hearts were civilised food—cheap, at all events—and as Styles ate anything that was offered him, this, to us, objectionable dish was served up twice a week—Tues-

days and Fridays—and when cold (as it always was) tasted and felt like greasy India-rubber.

As if this wasn't enough, Queen Mob established a most oppressive institution, viz. having the pudding *first*, by which the fine edge of appetite was supposed to be considerably dulled, and no small amount of animal food preserved to the domestic economy. Who could turn from Norfolk dumplings with sweet sauce, to cold bullock's heart?

We tried a deputation to Styles. It failed, though headed by Harry Maitland. Styles would hear of no objections to Queen Mob's arrangements. He himself fared like his boys, and he dismissed the deputation with a half-holiday.

Such was our respect for the jolly old fellow himself, that it is possible we might have given in, starving, or sickening, over Queen Mob's dietary, till our stomachs got accustomed to the worse than Spartan fare, but for the unlooked-for event upon which my story turns.

One morning the master did not appear. The senior usher passed in and out of the room with an unusually anxious face, and, returning after a longer absence than common, addressed the school to the effect that Styles had been seized in the night with severe illness, which was momentarily increasing, and that he was now delirious. Feeling the approach of the attack, he had, with his usual presence of mind, prescribed some regulations for the conduct of the school, earnestly requesting that the

boys should not be dismissed, and dictating a pressing message to a neighbouring clergyman—a fellow-collegian—begging him to undertake for a few days the superintendence. The messenger, however, had just returned with the intelligence that Mr. Ringrose was in Wales, and would not be back for three days.

I don't now, much as we liked Old Styles, pretend that some of the idler spirits among us did not find comfort in the relaxation of discipline that inevitably followed; still, I do believe everything would have gone on smoothly enough, had it not been for those confounded hearts! The second day of Styles's illness, Mary Percival did not appear. The hearts *did*. This was bad enough, but who can picture the rage and consternation of the hungry crowd, when, on the following day, the abominable dish appeared again? It was a direct and positive insult—an actual challenge to disaffection and mutiny. Boys couldn't stand it. We didn't; but on this occasion, with the exception of a few deep, significant murmurs, there was no row. The fellows simply pushed away their plates in disgust, and refused to eat.

Though we observed Queen Mob glare round with a malignant smile, we were scarcely prepared for the determined purpose of her soul. It isn't pretty to talk Latin before ladies, but there's a well-known proverb that means, literally, when the gods take a spite against

any chap, they begin by circumfoozling his comprehensive faculties, and making a muff of him. So they did with Queen Mob. She had sense enough of her own, and can you conceive her being guilty of the absurdity of supposing she could starve us into eating any stuff she chose? By Jove! sir, the hearts came up the third day, with an intimation that, until they were eaten, no other dinners would be served!

Then the shell exploded!

With a shout of execration, the school rose, pushed over the forms with a crash, and rushed out, the two masters (themselves disgusted) feebly striving to arrest the rout, and insisting upon saying grace! "*Grace!*"—Arrived in the playground, consultations were held, and plans hastily agreed upon. "No food—no lessons!" was the unanimous resolve. The rebellion had in fact begun. Yells of defiance resounded on all sides. Seditious sentiments appeared in chalky characters upon the walls, and even the black board, which hung above the master's chair, for the purpose of illustrating problems, &c., was made the medium of public opinion.

"No viscera!" "Hearts be hanged!" "No Mob law!" &c. &c., were among the expressions heard. One youth, inspired by an agency which has made greater poets—an empty stomach—improvised the following revolutionary stanza, which being sung in chorus to a popular tune, produced a fine effect:—

Hard hearts, tough hearts, greasy and cold,
Roasted cricket-balls nine days old,
At jolly Old Styles's school!
Rancid butter and mouldy cheese,
That you may have, whenever you please,
So long as Queen Mob doth rule!—*Hooray!*

Poor Styles's illness, even the mysterious princess, were, in the excitement of the moment, utterly forgotten. We all did exactly as we liked. As for the masters, they wandered wildly about, bullying the smaller and appealing to the older fellows, equally in vain. The former process we stopped in a summary manner.

Our second master was a fellow of the name of Hornidge—Gilbert Hornidge. He'd been a master's mate before he was a master, and had brought with him into his new sphere all the roughness of his former profession, without its heartiness. He was a confounded bully, and never lost an opportunity of pitching into one of us juniors. Seeing him boxing the ears of a little chap who had been executing a war-dance round him, but had miscalculated his distance, Harry Maitland, accompanied by four of the biggest fellows, walked quietly up to him, and apologising politely for the odds it was necessary to bring against a gentleman of such proportions, informed him that the next overt act of violence on his part would be visited with condign punishment. Whereupon Mr. Hornidge retired into his private den.

It was about two o'clock, when the school-bell (which

might be sounded either from the house or the school-room) gave out a sudden summons. This we thought proper to obey; not, however, with the slightest intention of resuming study, but rather of bullying the bewildered masters in the very seat of authority.

This pleasant game had scarcely begun, when the door opened, and Mr. Ringrose made his appearance. He was a quiet, amiable man, somewhat older than Styles, and was personally acquainted with two or three of the upper school. To these he addressed himself in the tone of quiet surprise, that sometimes pays better than direct reproof, or doubtful threatenings, demanding the reason of their selecting the moment of our respected master's illness for so disgraceful a demonstration.

Shouts of "No hearts!" "Give us Christian food!" &c. &c., replied.

Now it happened that worthy Mr. Ringrose, kind and gentle as he was by nature, had an immense idea of the rights and powers of all constituted authorities, and would have risked anything rather than yield to intimidation, no matter how just the complaint. According to him, submission must precede concession.

This sentiment he at once avowed, in the very teeth of the enraged and hungry boys; and then proceeded to inform us that it was impossible for him to assume the superintendence of the school, his presence being urgently required elsewhere; that a fitting substitute having been vainly sought, it had been at first determined to dismiss

the boys to their homes; but, in deference to the earnest charge of our poor master, and at the pressing solicitation of a *lady*, now resident in the house, this resolution had been rescinded.

"On appealing," concluded Mr. Ringrose, with a half smile, "to the young lady in question *how* it was possible to carry on the school in the absence of a proper classical teacher, Miss Percival replied that *she* ——"

Roars of laughter, and shouts of "The princess!" "The princess!" "Hooray for the princess!" drowned the remainder of the speech. The seniors, however, already anticipating some fun, rather bestirred themselves to quiet the demonstration, lest, perhaps, our too ready enthusiasm should awaken in the breast of the worthy Ringrose any misgiving as to its sincerity.

That gentleman—though not a little puzzled as to what was meant by the term "princess"—accepted the shout as a proof of our satisfaction; and, observing that he would allow us ten minutes to decide whether we were prepared to recognise the proposed authority, and yield to it that implicit deference without which no study could be carried on, quitted the room, it being arranged that the sounding of the school bell should signify our consent. An eager consultation followed among the seniors, uninterrupted by any disorder, the smaller chaps feeling that they had no alternative but to follow the seniors' lead, and the latter foreseeing no end of fun in the plan proposed.

Within the given period, therefore, the resolution was carried, the signal given, and Mr. Ringrose re-entered the schoolroom, with the slight, graceful figure of our masked princess on his arm. He led her to the master's seat, which was in a corner of the room, upon a portion of the floor a little elevated above the rest. It was fronted, moreover, with a sort of office-screen, glazed and curtained at the top, so that the teacher might observe his charge at pleasure without being himself much seen. On the left, against the wall, was a small bookcase. Above the chair hung the great black board before referred to; and at the back of the dais appeared an ominous-looking fixture, like the stump of a tree cut off two feet from the ground. This was the block, at which chaps knelt to receive punishment, in view of the school.

Mr. Ringrose then came forward, and received from Harry Maitland, Ambrose Hall, Tom Bush, and other seniors, a solemn assurance, by which they pledged themselves, on behalf of the school generally, to yield respectful obedience to the authority of Miss Percival, who remained seated the while, looking (except as to her baleful eyes) the very incarnation of womanly gentleness.

When Maitland had spoken, and the other fellows murmured their assent, she bowed slightly—*very* slightly—and smiled—a strange, ironical smile, as was remarked at the time by some close observer, and extended

her beautiful white hand to Mr. Ringrose, as though in token that she needed his countenance and support no longer.

Then Mr. Ringrose quitted the room, and we were alone with our queen.

For a good minute we gazed at her, and she at us, in silence. The strangeness of the situation kept *us* quiet. How it affected *her* I can't say. To all appearance, she never changed a muscle. Suddenly she rose:

"The school will assemble at three ——"

Low murmurs followed, for it was Wednesday, a half-holiday.

"The school will assemble at three, and at the same hour on succeeding Wednesdays until further notice, as a penalty for this disorder."

You might have distinctly heard a fly caressing his nose during this speech, so completely stupefied were we at this first exercise of power. Before we had recovered, our Queen Stork had glided from the room.

The playground was a curious scene that morning. Cricket wasn't dreamed of. Chaps walked gravely about in pairs, or gathered in clusters round some detached senior, listening to his maturer views; while, squatting under the tamarisks, like Indian chiefs at a palaver, Harry Maitland and his particular friends, with knitted brows, reviewed the course they had so hastily adopted — not without some little misgiving that, if sticking to

one's word was to be the order of the day, they had somewhat imperilled the general liberties.

Upon the whole, however, livelier views prevailed. Discipline must be relaxed—*that* was inevitable. Lessons will be short and easy, for no young lady can have ventured much beyond Cæsar and Cornelius Nepos—and it will be, no doubt, a jolly lark to see her boggling at Homer! Our spirits rose rapidly, and thus it happened that, even before the accustomed hour, the schoolroom was well filled by fellows waiting eagerly the commencement of the fun.

Jokes at the expense of the new directress went smartly round, and various ingenious little plots for rendering her position as awkward and embarrassing as possible were hastily concocted. To these the big fellows made but faint opposition, satisfying their consciences by refraining from any open share, and perhaps seeing no reason for taking upon them the "police" of the school, which properly belonged to the masters.

Among other things, it came into the head of Charley Lysons, the mischievous, who had a turn for the fine arts, to sketch upon the black board above the master's chair a pre-Raphaelite cartoon. This design represented a rustic dame, with nose and chin amicably kissing each other, and (to avoid any misapprehension) with a bandage over her eyes. She was armed with an immense rod, and was engaged in dispensing justice and ortho-

graphy to a circle of sturdy louts, with countenances expressive of intense alarm.

Upon this happy inspiration the youthful artist was yet receiving our congratulations when the three o'clock bell rang.

A few moments elapsed, the door quietly opened, and Mary Percival, cool and unembarrassed as though entering a friend's boudoir, glided in and took her place. Not alone, however; Queen Mob immediately followed her, carrying a basket piled up with disabled socks and handkerchiefs to a height that convinced us we were destined to enjoy her society for the rest of the afternoon, as duenna to the young directress.

The latter threw a calm and comprehensive glance round the apartment, taking in but not dwelling upon Charley Lysons' performance, arranged some books on the desk before her, and spoke:—

“Mr. Weekes.”

The voice, sweet, clear, and liquid as a harp-string, sounded oddly in that rough assemblage; the more so, as the name she uttered was, as I have before observed, never heard from that chair save in the association of impending punishment.

“Mr. Weekes” arose, shambled up the school, and stationed himself—mechanically, as it were—in the spot he usually occupied when engaged in his official duties, *i.e.* close by the block, awaiting, with his hands in his trowsers pockets, and his mouth and round eyes wide open, the next order.

"I am informed by Mr. Styles and Mr. Ringrose," said the musical voice of our directress, "that this has always hitherto been a school of gentlemen. Gentlemen may regret but never disavow their deeds. The author of this folly" (she tossed her little head back as though disdaining to look at the board) "will step forward and efface it."

"Don't peach, you fellows," said Charley Lysons, putting down his head and speaking along the desk. Something made Charley regret that he had been the *first* to offend.

"Am I understood?" inquired the princess, sweetly.

"Don't stand it, Charley," said one chap, who was a bit of a sneak.

"Go, Charley," suggested another, who wasn't.

"Blest if I do!" said Charley himself.

"You go, young Lysons," said Harry Maitland, in a low, fierce tone (he wanted to humour the princess a little), "or look out, after five."

The dark suggestion of something disagreeable when the school rose determined Charley. He got up sulkily, and, mounting the platform, tore down the board; then, kneeling, proceeded to rub out with his cuffs and handkerchief the efforts of his genius; indemnifying himself, however, as he did so, by a pantomimic gesture, concealed, as he not unnaturally imagined, by the board.

Unlucky Charley! His thumb had not fairly quitted his nose, before vengeance was upon him! With one step, like the glide of a panther, the princess was at his

side ; there was the flash of a white hand, and a box on the ear such as, with the combination of pain and surprise, sent the boy fairly rolling from the platform upon the schoolroom floor.

"For the *second* insult, not the first," remarked the princess, gently ; and resumed her seat.

"Who'd have thought those gimlet-eyes of hers could see through a board ?" muttered Charley.

Business now proceeded with tolerable tranquillity for some half hour or so, during which many curious glances were directed towards our mysterious mistress, who was dimly seen through the glazed screen immersed in thought or study.

"She's getting up the Latin," suggested somebody.

"*Corderius*," said the musical voice, as though in answer.

(The *Corderius* class was usually taken by one of the under-masters.)

"I thought so ; she'll take the easy ones," said Charley Lysons, spitefully.

Up went the class, and formed its usual half-circle round the chair, the leader politely presenting his book to the lady, who flung it carelessly on the desk. She heard the lesson, with the same cool, quiet air ; detecting, however, the slightest inaccuracy, and correcting it with a sort of hasty, careless disdain, not easy to describe, often accompanied by that peculiar smile we had already noticed. It was a smile that did not cheer, but chill ;

I suppose it was like that of Henry the Cruel, as the books tell us, whose "sweet friend" meant, *literally*, "go and be hanged!" We learned to dread it even more afterwards, as we knew her better.

The lesson drew to an end, and but three or four lines remained; these, according to custom, should have fallen to the lot of the last boy in the class. Something induced the mistress to transfer them to the boy immediately above him, who had executed his own portion with remarkable glibness and accuracy. Nevertheless, he was the greatest blockhead in the school. Learn he wouldn't or couldn't, but it was his habit to get up at least a minute portion of every lesson, and by carefully calculating where his turn would come, usually managed to cut in, and make a very respectable display, being in reality totally ignorant of about eleven-twelfths of what he had to study.

Of course, in the present case, poor Brome Debary was at once floored. Queen Stork, with ominous patience (and her terrible smile), put him through the entire lesson, word by word. Not one could he manage! Then she gave him his own portion. Here Brome's tongue was loosed, and he gabbled over it with an alacrity which, alas! only helped to convict him of the fraud. It was evident, however, that Queen Stork had long since detected it, and the interest that now began to attach to the scene induced a profound silence. Would she venture to punish him—and how?

Curiosity was quickly satisfied. She dismissed the class.

"Remain, sir," she added to Brome.

She then turned to her desk, and, taking something from it, handed to Looby Weekes, who still retained his position, a stick, or rather whip, of three fibres closely plaited together, altogether not thicker than an ordinary cane, perfectly black, and looking fearfully hard and pliant. It had a leathern handle, like a coach-whip, which offered a beautiful grip. Poor Brome had visited that block too often to miss his way, or, indeed, to feel greatly dismayed at what was impending; so, yielding to destiny and Queen Stork, he knelt patiently down, and received on his hardened shoulders six sharp strokes. But he had miscalculated the amount of pain. No cane ever cut like *that*! Two strokes he endured with surprise, but fortitude. At the third,

"It's not *fair*," bellowed Brome.

The fifth elicited a terrible howl, and the last dismissed the luckless Brome from the block, if not a better, at least a wiser boy, for he never tried *that* artifice again.

"For idleness and deception," said the princess, in her sweetest tone, as Brome, writhing with rage and pain, staggered away.

At all this Queen Mob had looked on with undisguised delight, never interfering in the remotest manner, but resuming her darning with a chuckle and a goggle of approval.

Although by this time it was abundantly clear that we, the juniors, had caught a Tartar, the *real* trial was still to come. Gradually it approached.

"Virgil," said the directress.

A class of fifteen fellows, about the age of twelve or thirteen, now stood up, prepared to construe the poet in question, the head boy, as usual, offering his book. As before, the lady declined this aid, and, with consummate coolness, nodded to the class to proceed, appearing, to our extreme astonishment, as well "up" in the most difficult passages of the *Æneid* as in the dissyllabic fragments of Corderius! Not an error escaped her, and the occasional substitution of some searching phrase for the conventional renderings to which schoolboys are addicted, showed her completely mistress of the subject.

The lesson was passing off very smoothly, each boy taking up the author where the last left off, at the pleasure of the teacher, when, about the middle of the class, Fred Prowett, who was construing, came to a sudden stand.

"Well, sir?" said the princess, interrogatively.

"Please 'm, that's all."

"All! In the middle of a sentence? What is your lesson?"

"Fifty lines, 'm, and on to the next full stop."

"Proceed, then."

"Please 'm, full stop."

"Virgil, sir, is believed to have understood his own language. Give me your book."

She took it, examined, and returned it, took the next, and the next, and so on through the whole class. As she was about to give back the last, an idea seemed to strike her; she held up the leaf between her eyes and the light; the terrible smile gathered on her lip. The trick was discovered!

You must know that an ingenious chap of our class had found out that by dipping the point of a pin in ink and striking it into the page, a mark was produced almost exactly resembling a printed period. If, therefore, at the end of the allotted fifty lines, the want of a full stop added materially to the length of the lesson, we sometimes took the liberty of introducing one. Oddly enough, though the eccentricities of Virgil's punctuation had not a little puzzled the worthy Styles, it had never occurred to him that there was any trick. In the present case, however, less care than usual having been observed, so inhuman a divorce had been brought about between a verb and a substantive it governed, that a less penetrating eye than Queen Stork's must have detected the fraud.

She laid down the book and paused, regarding us contemptuously. Her eye glanced from us to Looby Weekes, who still stood, grasping the black cane, aghast at the idea of having perhaps to flog fifteen boys! But it was a different decree:—

"The lesson will henceforth be one hundred lines," said the princess, calmly. "You may go, *gentlemen!*"

We slunk away, some of us a *leetle* ashamed, and began to compare notes. Opinions were a good deal divided. The junior boys certainly regretted the change.

Brome Debary shrugged his still smarting shoulders, and grumbled mutiny.

Charley Lysons suggested plans of insidious revenge.

Some older chaps hinted at the pledge we had given.

"Give her rope," said Harry Maitland, darkly. And—

"Greek play," said the musical voice, as calmly as though it had called for Goody Two-Shoes, in the original.

Disdainful smiles were exchanged among the members of this, the first class, as they rose, in a rather dignified manner, and strolled up to the platform.

"Now for a lark!" whispered a junior next me.

This time Queen Stork accepted the book tendered by the leader; but nevertheless held it in her hand, with a provoking carelessness that did not promise well for any especial *fun*.

It happened, moreover, to be the same play I had heard Styles reading to her, viz. the *Alcestis* of Euripides.

In the course of the lesson occurred the queen's dying speech:—

"Αλλε, και φάος ἀμέρας
Ουρανιαι τε διναι, &c. &c.

Admetus rejoins :

'Ορα σε καμε, &c.

"Stop," said the princess. "What is the nominative to ορα?"

"Ουρανιαι," replied Maitland, carelessly.

"Because," said the princess, "it happens to lie conveniently near. An excellent reason. Common sense, however, puts in a claim on behalf of Ἥλιος, the substantive *first* mentioned by Alcestis. Go on."

With one or two such hints the lesson proceeded to a satisfactory conclusion, the princess showing herself to be on the best possible terms with Euripides, and (though with scarcely a glance at the book) not permitting the slightest deviation from his text, except when, in one instance, she herself altered a disputed reading.

Five o'clock struck, and, without word or sign, Queen Stork glided from the room as quietly as she came. Queen Mob, on her part, gathered up her work, grinned horribly at the school, as much as to say, "How do you like it *now*?" and followed.

Some of us, I've no doubt, looked foolish enough. The seniors were divided. The princess's talents commanded their respect and admiration; and there was, besides, the novelty of the situation to excite their in-

terest. Some, however, and among them Harry Maitland, were considerably mortified by the bearing she assumed. They had expected that, since it was evident the masters possessed little influence, she would have established a friendly understanding with the older boys, and relied upon their authority and example for the preservation of order; whereas she appeared determined to make not the slightest distinction! Now the question was, was this to be borne?

After much discussion, it was decided to try the event of another day.

"Give her every chance," said Harry, indulgently.

School, on the morrow, proceeded quietly enough; but, at dinner-time, a new test had to be endured. Up came, as usual, the abominable hearts; this time, however, hot and nicely dressed, with stuffing, and an alluring gravy. The princess sat on the right of Queen Mob; was, of course, helped first, and seemed to swallow her portion with considerable relish. So did the G. P. B.'s. Ashamed to refuse, we followed the example of our betters, and were in some sort rewarded by the appearance of two magnificent plum-puddings, such as had never, in the memory of the oldest boy, graced those boards.

All this increased the good humour of the general body; and not only for that, but the succeeding day, business was allowed to proceed without disorder.

On the fourth morning, however, the impatience of

some of the older fellows under Queen Stork's lofty bearing and exacting rule began by degrees to evince itself. Maitland openly declared *he* would stand it no longer, threw off the mask of obedience, and assumed an entirely new demeanour. He strolled into school ten minutes after time. He conversed aloud. He flung a book across the room to Boss Twigge, and committed other indiscretions too numerous to mention. Sometimes these demonstrations evoked corresponding ones from other seniors, always a titter from the juniors. Now and then a fellow of gentler mood would put in:—

“Quiet, Harry. Don't, old boy. Bother! It's a shame.”

But this style of opposition only irritated Maitland more. He could not bring himself to believe that the school generally were such spoons as to yield placid obedience to a girl of twenty, though she did know something of Greek.

Strange was it that Queen Stork never took open notice of the growing disaffection, though only the previous day she had delivered over a chap to the tender attentions of her gentleman usher of the black rod for a mere act of carelessness—dropping an inkstand. That she observed what passed, nobody could doubt; for we saw her strange, terrible eyes steadily fixed upon Maitland—never upon any other offender—as though she at once recognised in *him* the core of the rebellion. We knew that Harry's shots were telling. She called up a

junior class, and, after looking at them for more than a minute with an air of the most profound depression, dismissed them unheard, and resumed her former attitude, gazing, as though fascinated, at the destroyer of her peace, and of the power she had so nearly established.

Some fellows—Hall and Lindsay among them—were rather touched by the strange princess's evident distress, and begged Harry to desist. But he angrily bade them mind their own business; and the day concluded in a very uncomfortable manner—no lessons heard, and the princess retiring, on Queen Mob's arm, her head stooped, and she herself with all the appearance of a person suffering both mental and physical pain.

Sunday intervened; and on Monday the struggle—if it might be called so—recommenced. Maitland, backed by one or two other malcontents, especially Boss Twigge, his great admirer, renewed his annoyances—the declared object being to compel the princess to what they termed a “capitulation.”

“Let her,” said Harry, “make friends of us, or see if we don't lead her a dance!”

“She's ill,” said good-natured Ambo Hall. “Look, she's leaning her face on her hands.”

“Sulking, sir,” rejoined Harry. “A little more, and we'll bring her regularly to. Hi, you Pounsett, lend us that.”

He snatched a small popgun from the boy's hand, and took aim at the princess's screen. I don't think he

intended at first to shoot; but, excited by the laugh around him, he *did*. The pellet struck the glazed portion directly in front of the princess's face.

She started to her feet, her eyes literally flashing through the mask, and the terrible smile plainly visible.

"I thank you," she said. "A direct insult is all I needed . . . Mr. Weekes!"

Looby shuffled up to his post. She threw him the whip.

"Henry Maitland."

Harry laughed scornfully.

"Flog *me*!" he exclaimed, and looked round the school as though for support. But, to his astonishment, the popular voice was mute.

Boss Twigge did indeed mutter his persuasion that if a senior cock were punished, the lord mayor himself might be the next victim.

With this exception, an almost profound silence succeeded.

"I waste no words upon you," said the princess. "Either submit to your punishment, less degrading than the cowardice that has provoked it, or rid my benefactor's house of your evil presence. Choose!"

She moved to the door, and threw it open.

Maitland's eye once more glanced over the expectant crowd. He had gone just a step too far—that one step which has ruined so many clever conceptions. There was a littleness in the insult he had offered, that

awoke the better feelings of the boys. Opinion was against him. Not a voice, not a look, encouraged him. But—the humiliation! His heart swelled—he moved towards the door.

What sound is that at the lower desks? A murmur—a hiss—increasing with every step he takes. *They* deem him coward, too—the boys—the little boys! Harry stopped short, and threw up his head. The hiss stopped, then a low example of applause from the upper school was re-echoed heartily below. In that second, Harry's resolution was taken.

He walked calmly up to the platform, and knelt. The princess closed the door.

Poor Harry could not refrain from bestowing a warning glance on Looby, which said distinctly:

“Strike gingerly, old fellow, or look out for your own skin!”

This, and the unexampled duty of whopping a senior cock, had their natural effect upon Looby, who consequently delivered the first stroke with a tenderness approaching the ludicrous. But the princess was not to be trifled with. With her graceful panther step she was at his side, caught the whip from his hand, and, with a force in which all the resentment of her proud nature seemed centred, administered one of those short, sharp cuts that hurt worse than a sweeping stroke.

We saw the blood rush to Harry's forehead; but, though the whip must have cut like a knife, he gave

no other sign of pain, and even bent forward, as though courting a repetition from the menacing white hand, already lifted for the purpose. She changed her mind, however, flung the rod disdainfully back to Looby, and signed to him to continue the punishment.

Harry took it like a hero, prolonged as it was, until another sign from the victorious princess bade the executioner desist. Then, with a dignity scarcely less than her own, he rose and retired to his place.

After twelve o'clock, just as we were assembling in the playground, a message summoned Harry to the study. He went. Queen Stork was there, alone. She was pacing the room in her favourite attitude, with her hands clasped, and her head bent down.

"I sent for you, sir," she began, calmly, "to—to——" (Here her voice faltered, and she broke into a sudden passion that made Harry start.) "Boy, or man, whichever you pretend to be, what had I done to you, that you should have forced me to this? *What* was your hostility? If you knew nothing of the deep debt of gratitude I owe my generous friend, some portion of which I sought to repay by taking upon me this unfitting charge, at least you might have honoured the apparent motive, and recognised, in my dismissal of all other support, an appeal to your forbearance few English natures, of any age, would have resisted."

Harry made an involuntary step forward.

"Be silent, sir!" she continued. "Never presume

to address me but in your class—a need I cannot escape. But go, rather. Oh! do as I proposed to you. Leave us. Let me work out my task in peace. It is to restore the school to my protector's hands *better* than I found it. The power, the gift, the opportunity—all are mine. Nothing but your childish malice could have obstructed me, and your own act has made that harmless. Yet go, if you desire it: if not, I thank you for your open enmity. I can deal with such opponents. I sent for you to say so, and to add one word—Beware!”

She made one step towards him, and the strange meaning in her eyes almost made Harry recoil.

The boy came back from that interview looking as though he had seen a ghost. We did not for a long time afterwards learn what had passed. Harry was mysterious. We did, however, find out that an utter change had taken place in the feelings of our schoolfellow, and that all rebellion on *his* part was at an end.

In truth, Queen Stork's power was now completely established. The school submitted at discretion. Often and often since I have wondered at the completeness of our subjection. Positively, we were more like the slaves of some Eastern despot than pupils at an English school. There was, to be sure, an odd sort of pleasure in submitting to the rule of the heroine of so many romantic dreams. Then there was a self-complacent feeling that we were yielding rather to a principle than to outward compulsion. Perhaps, too, one cause of the princess's

extraordinary influence lay in the utter absence of the slightest familiarity of intercourse ; not a word of civility, far less of praise or approval, ever passed her lips. Rewards were out of the question. Those who did well were simply not punished. On the other hand, in correction, she was sternness itself. She rarely, indeed, resorted to the rod—never again in the case of a senior. It had become a fashion to obey her least command, and she would have been at a loss for any serious provocation. But impositions, confinement to school, bread-and-water diet, badges of disgrace, were dispensed with a merciless hand.

In addition, she doubled all the regular tasks, and managed, in various ways, so to stimulate the energies of the school, that I am sure, in the five weeks of her iron rule, our education was advanced by at least as many months. I'm bound to admit that, while she furnished our heads, she did not neglect our stomachs. A remarkable change came over the housekeeping department, such as could not possibly be owing to Queen Mob. The dinners were beautifully cooked, plentiful and excellent, hearts being altogether omitted. Coffee and chocolate were provided for those who preferred them. Even "Will's basket" underwent an enforced improvement, and that most fraudulent purveyor found himself, to his extreme disgust, compelled to provide new and wholesome cakes, at a reduced profit of only fifty per cent.

I must go back a little.

Though the princess had, one might imagine, enjoyed a sufficient revenge, it was evident she could not forgive Harry Maitland. Not in the least was she mollified by his subsequent submission. In vain the poor fellow laboured to regain her good opinion. Perfectly just in everything else, with *him* she seemed to go out of her way to seek causes of irritation. Sometimes she would treat him with contemptuous neglect, passing him over in the class as though he were invisible; at other times my lady would pounce upon him with a difficult passage—nay, with the entire lesson, and woe to him if he made a single error!

Once she compelled him to repeat three times over a particular passage, on the pretence that he did not read distinctly; and for a slight impatience in his tone on the third attempt to please her, gave him a thousand lines of Homer to write out and learn by heart! It cost him five days' confinement, and was exacted to the last letter!

But the most trying thing of all was this. There was a chap in one of the junior classes who happened to be a favourite of Harry's. He was a clever boy, but had a singular defect of memory, arising from nervous sensibility, which caused him frequently to break down in class, though a moment before completely master of the lesson. He went up one morning, a little beaten by the double task, and as he passed his friend Harry,

who sat within speaking distance of the platform, cast an appealing look at him, which Harry could not fail to understand. Whether the princess's eagle eye discerned it also, I can't say; at all events, she, on the instant, singled out poor little Freddy as her victim, and with the first sharp question knocked all that remained of the lesson out of his head. Freddy fidgeted, coloured, began to cry—when Harry ventured a slight prompt. Carefully as it was managed, the princess's ear caught the sound. The boding smile appeared. Presently the class was dismissed, Freddy ordered to remain, and "Mr. Weekes" summoned to a conference.

Poor Freddy, who had never been punished before, and had an especial dread of pain, displayed such an agony of terror that Maitland determined to intercede. He respectfully approached the princess, and, with manly deference, apologised for the interference, pointing out that the fault was his, and offering to submit to any fitting penalty in place of the frightened Freddy.

The princess smiled haughtily, but gave no other answer, and poor Fred's shoulders had to bear their own burden; and, perhaps—thanks to Harry—a little more!

Now I dare say you wonder why, in the name of goodness, Harry bore all this so patiently.

It's not odd at all. Here's the secret. Now don't laugh . . . *Harry Maitland was in love!*

Upon my word of honour it's true. It was written,

I suppose, in the book of his destiny, that he *should* be spooney on the princess. For, without any kicking or splashing on Harry's part, that lady had quietly popped him into her net. He was gone, helpless, fettered—a captive and a slave. We couldn't chaff him much on the subject. It was no joke to Harry, and he cut up so fierce, that we were obliged to contemplate the rise and progress of his curious attachment in silent surprise. He was, we could perceive, not a little disgusted and annoyed with himself, and, I dare say, could not help feeling that there was something absurd in the grim satisfaction with which he found himself yielding to the caprices of his young tyrant. I believe that he was rather disappointed than otherwise that she never flogged him again; but she had better instruments of torture than the black rod, and reserved the operation of the latter chiefly for the benefit of Brome Debary and Charley Lysons, in whose breasts certainly no sentiment found room save those of intense hatred and burning vengeance.

One morning a rumour prevailed that Styles's illness had taken one of its sudden turns; that he was, in fact, convalescent, and anxious to resume the duties of direction. It was perfectly true. Moreover, his medical advisers having recommended compliance with his wishes, it was announced that on the Tuesday following he would resume his place in school; the preceding day, Monday, being given up to a school *fête*, to be held in

some woodlands in the vicinity, in honour of his recovery.

To say that we were not glad of the approaching change would be hardly true. *I* was, for one, for I was an idle young scamp, and, as such, had no chance with the princess. Nevertheless, we had shaken into the new harness, and had, upon the whole, jogged on comfortably enough.

Poor Harry, however, was heart-sick at the idea of being delivered from his task-mistress. Unforgiven, too! After all his sufferings, and patience, and endeavours to conciliate, would she withdraw from the superintendence without one word, one look, to show that she was conscious of his repentance? It seemed too cruel. It was too true.

The last day of Queen Stork's authority arrived. During the concluding hours of business, she, for the first time, relaxed her haughty bearing. She complimented several boys on their improvement and diligence, making the silly chaps colour with pleasure. She shook hands with the leaders of the several classes—(Harry was second in *his*, and it went to his soul to see the little white hand conceal itself within the brown, cricket-hardened fist of old Bill Stumps); she actually thanked one big fellow, whom she had rather bullied, for the good feeling which had prompted his submission to her "needful severity;" she called up Brome Debary (whom she had flogged by the hand of Looby thirteen

times), and, presenting him with a beautiful book, and a kind exhortation to peruse the same, sent him away in a passion of forgiving tears. To Looby Weekes she presented the black rod itself; not without a gentle intimation that, had he made its acquaintance earlier in his career, it was possible he might not still have been engaged in mortal strife with Corderius.

That remarkable relic remains still among the archives of the school, and a very pretty instrument it is. That *I* can tell you!

Five o'clock struck.

Jump! went Harry's heart, as if he had not expected it. What, not one word? Unjust to the last!

The princess rose, and locked her desk. The school rose also, and remained respectfully standing. Harry Maitland was so placed that she must approach him closely in order to leave the room. She bowed to the masters, then to the boys—turned—her eyes swept over Harry's speaking face, but there was no answer—none. The door opened—closed—she was gone!

Queen Stork had fulfilled her mission. She took the school in idleness, confusion, rebellion. She restored it in the most complete and healthy order, improved in manner, in feeling, in study. She took with her the unfeigned respect of seventy-three boys, and the heart of *one*.

The *fête* came off, as proposed. A glorious day, warm, with a soft, fresh breeze, that gives animation to

everything, and calls out the light and colour from Nature's cheeks and eyes. (That's not *my* idea; it's from a fellow's theme, who had rather a flowery style.) The fun began with a splendid cricket-match, in which a neighbouring school were our antagonists, and got a jolly licking; Styles, who was always greatly interested in our successes, giving 5*l.* among the winners. Then we had football, hare and hounds, and lots of other games, for which the playground at home was too confined.

At three o'clock we sat down on the grass, under some splendid sycamores, to a regular feast, and such a revel you never saw. Styles, though still weak, was in high spirits, and did his best to make everybody comfortable.

So did the princess.

She still wore her mask, of course; but she had also a round hat, with a fall of black lace that lessened the ugliness. Still, she looked strange enough; and the boys of the other school could not make her out at all, especially as we mystified them to the utmost. But, on this happy day, Queen Stork's grace and kindness, not to mention her beauty—for, whatever was the matter with her eyes, *we* knew well enough by this time that all the rest was beautiful—won everybody's heart.

And poor Harry! I forgot him: so, indeed, did many of us, for he disappeared early in the day. Once he threw himself into the path of his inexorable mistress,

and she turned proudly away. Deeply wounded, the poor boy hurried from the scene of festivity, plunged into the thickest part of the woodland, and, after rambling about alone for some time, threw himself on the ground at the foot of an old oak. Here he lay, as he afterwards told us, listening to the just-distinguishable shouts of the merry-makers. It was now about four o'clock; the feast must be over; and they are no doubt drinking healths—Styles's, the Princess's, even Queen Mob's. *He* lay there, alone, as much forgotten as though he had never breathed. One only gleam of comfort visited his soul. Seeing how *she* hated him, she would rejoice in his absence (if, indeed, she noticed it), and *might*, he thought, give him credit for purposely removing an unwelcome object from her sight. But it was a mingled feeling, and, as it passed through his mind, caused his heart to swell, and certain unmanly drops to make the boughs he gazed on grow suddenly indistinct. I asked you not to laugh at him. However he came by it, it was his first great grief, his first great love; and I dare say he was, for the time, as unhappy as any of that disconsolate lot—the rejected lovers.

It's a very uncomfortable feeling that, of thinking everything in nature jollier than one's self. It doesn't seem fair, you see, that the very ants—(Harry might have crushed a score or so of them with a turn of his foot)—should be so happy and busy; nor did it seem altogether the thing, that a little flower close beside him

should be turning a confident blue eye upward, as though it had never known an uncomfortable moment, while immortal man lay tossing, writhing, weeping, in helpless sorrow ! (These observations, you must understand, are Harry's own, when he afterwards told us all about it.)

Harry thought he never could be happy again, and that he would rather die at once. But he was only fifteen, and even that effectual remedy seemed rather a shame. Then came into his mind, with a new pang, two lines of Homer, which occurred in his last imposition, where discontented Thetis is pitching into the Thunderer about her son :—

So short a space the light of heav'n to view—
So short a space—and filled with sorrow too.

He almost felt it prophetic.

Exactly at this moment, a sound, scarcely louder than a dropping leaf, caused him to look round. He leaped to his feet.

The princess !——

“What are you doing here, away from your companions ?” she asked him, coldly.

“Nothing, as you see, Miss Percival,” said Harry, with a dismal effort at a smile.

“They have nearly finished their repast. Why did you not join them ?”

“I was not hungry.”

“Give me the true reason.”

"I will," said Harry, colouring. "I left, Miss Percival, that—that there might be nothing to offend your sight, on a day which owes so much of its happiness to *you*."

"On the contrary, you seem resolved to displease me, to the last. How should the absence of one of my—of Mr. Styles's—best scholars, gratify me?"

"Your manner assured me of it," said Harry.

"You might have had patience."

"Patience! Oh!" sighed poor Harry, and stopped.

The princess smiled involuntarily. Harry's heart revived and expanded like a frozen butterfly.

"Oh, Miss Percival——" he began.

"What is the matter?"

"You have forgiven me?"

"I have, long since; but I had reasons for concealing it. To-day I meant to have told you, and to have thanked you publicly for the advantage derived from your good example. It is now your turn to pardon, if I have used too great severity. Do so, and forget both it and *me*. I leave this house to-morrow, and in this world we shall never meet again."

"Oh, do not say so!" cried Harry, in an agony.

"Do you forgive me, Miss Percival, and make me happy with your generous praise, only to condemn me to a worse punishment than ever?"

"Singular boy! What do you mean?"

"I scarcely know, myself," said Harry, rather wildly.

"Perhaps I am mad. Am I? Oh, then, pardon my disordered words, and believe that I would rather die than offend you. Miss Percival, you think that these five weeks have been a time of penance to me. They have been the most blessed of my life! I did, indeed, my utmost to avert your displeasure; but, when I *could* not, then the penalties with which you visited my unwilling offences were pleasant to me, since they were assigned by you; and now you leave us, suddenly — oh, how suddenly! And there is no longer peace, or hope, or happiness in the world! Oh, that I were that flower you are crushing with your foot! One moment, *then*, and I should never more be conscious of your absence nor your scorn!"

Harry had sunk upon his knees at her feet.

The princess was strangely moved. You observe, Harry had said nothing about *love*. But he was talking to a woman. Bless you! *they* know directly when a fellow's in earnest and when he isn't, and often save you a deal of trouble! She laid her hand on the young bowed head:—

"My bad, *poor* boy!" she began — then, with an effort, she regained her usual self-command. "Know you what it *is* you think you love? You have never seen my face."

A sudden thought rose in Harry's mind.

"Oh, *let* me see it! All!"

"You seriously desire it?"

"With all my soul."

The princess hesitated.

"Have you courage?"

"For anything."

"Reflect," she said, earnestly. "You know not what you ask. You may repent it. You *will*. Be satisfied."

"Be merciful," said Harry, eagerly. "Show me your face."

"Prepare, then."

She put her hand to the fillet. A moment's irresolution—then she tore it off.

Harry, nerved as he was, started back as though some one had thrust a candle in his face! Well he might. They were not eyes that beamed upon him, but a pair of sister-stars (so Harry, in his poetic fervour, described them), so bright that one wonders from whence eyes, set in the accustomed manner, in flesh and blood, derive such unfathomable depth and lustre. They were fringed, moreover, with silken guards, that must, when closed in sleep, have trespassed considerably upon the delicate cheek beneath.

Poor Harry almost felt inclined to shade his own as he looked at these long-concealed glories, and wondered how even that artfully-hideous mask could have so effectually misrepresented them!

After a minute's pause the princess spoke:—

"Now for the moral of the mystery," she said, with

a sad smile. And, without replacing the mask, she sat down beneath the tree, and signed to Harry to do the like.

"About three years since, at little more than sixteen, I was engaged to be married to my cousin, Gordon Huntley ——"

"Gordon Huntley!" exclaimed Harry, involuntarily. "He whose extraordinary ——"

"Let me speak without interruption," said his companion, almost fiercely, "or you will know no more. My story shall not try your patience.

"Our parents, almost from the cradle, projected our union; and, what seems marvellous enough, our early acquaintance with this fact led to no quarrels with our fate, or with each other. It would have been next to impossible to quarrel with Gordon. His nature was, in truth, almost too gentle and placable. I tried, more than once, to ruffle his complacent mood, for no better reason than to gratify myself with the novel employment of pouring oil upon the troubled waves. I looked on every side for a cause of dissension. Perseverance in that amiable pursuit is seldom unrewarded. My cousin had one singular fancy. His admiration of what he called my beauty centered principally in my eyes! He would lie at my feet in perfect contentment, gazing upward at those organs, declaring that he knew their language as intimately as his mother-tongue—could plead, jest, argue with them—and needed no other channel whatever for the interchange of ideas.

"At first this fancy amused me, then perplexed, and ended by positively irritating me. I felt as if the spell which seemed to fascinate *him* began to exercise some influence upon myself! My eyes began to talk at random. At all events, I would submit them no longer to his interpretation. Here, too, was the opportunity I needed, of testing his placability.

"One morning, when I had promised to walk with him, I made my appearance wearing one of the thickest veils I could find. It was closely wrought, and covered with black stars, which effectually concealed my eyes.

"Gordon laughingly remonstrated, and begged leave to disencumber my bonnet of that disfigurement. I replied by securing it with a riband under my chin, and then quietly informed him that, until he gave me his promise to refrain from that gazing pastime which had ceased to be agreeable to me, I should not lay aside this shield. My cousin said little in reply; but either piqued by my tone, or imagining it a mere caprice, refused to make the promise I required.

"When, however, on the succeeding day, and the next, and next, I appeared similarly veiled, poor Gordon's patience gave way. Promise he would not, but he exhausted every argument and entreaty in his endeavour to make me rescind my determination. I remained firm: it was a fair trial of temper, one I had myself provoked; and, though fifty times on the eve of tearing

off the object of contention and scattering it to the winds, I kept that better impulse under stern control.

"At the end of a week the crisis came. We were walking in a little wood near my mother's house. Gordon tried one last argument—speaking with a gentle but anxious persuasiveness that went to my heart. Conscience whispered it was no longer the question of a fragment of lace, but of gentleness, docility, obedience, promising wifely love thereafter. My fingers grew restless, were actually stealing towards the detested veil, when my cousin, suddenly changing his tone, added,—

"'But if you will not ——'

"In a second, pride was in a blaze. I did not wait for the conclusion of what portended a threat.

"'Never, never,' I said, 'until you not only give me the promise I require, but apologise for this strange and unwarrantable persecution.'

"'Are you serious?' he said. 'Cousin'—his voice faltered—'for mercy's sake beware what you do. Do not jest with me. That is past. All is bitter earnest now. Decide, but not hastily. Take one minute ——'

"'One minute?' Without a pulse's pause, I turned and walked away—away from love, from peace, from hope, from pardon, for ever, ever, in this weary world.

"I never saw him again; nor I, nor any that knew or loved him. He never returned to his home, nor bade farewell to any, by letter or by word. His wealth—for he was rich—remained without a master, as his fate without a clue.

"I, too, formed my resolution. The eyes I had refused to his loving gaze should never be looked upon by others—should do penance until his return, or until all rational hope of it was gone. I have worn this mask three years—three years! *These* are the eyes, boy; gaze on them, abhor them. Oh!" she continued, starting up with a burst of eager passion, "how long, how long must I endure this misery? Alas! my cousin, my friend, my love, my husband, whither did you turn?—what was your fate? Living you cannot be, too generous so to visit a miserable caprice. No; dead, *dead* in some cavern of the dumb, dark sea—slain in foreign battle—starved in the pathless wilderness! Oh! earth, earth, where did you hide my dead? Soul, speak *thou*—rebuke, condemn me; break but this fearful silence with one answering word. *Where, where, oh WHERE?*"

The last words echoed up the woodland with a wild, despairing sound. She threw up her head, and wrung her little hands in the bitterest anguish.

Harry bowed his face. In the presence of that great sorrow, his own new-born sentiment dwindled into insignificance. At that instant there was a crashing through the boughs, and Fred Prowett, bursting into the open, rushed up out of breath.

"I thought I heard your voices. Please 'm, make haste, Mr. Styles wants you instantly—*instantly*."

"Not ill again, I trust?" cried the princess.

"Jolly as possible," said the excited youth. "He's

in an harbour we have built for him, and he's got something to show you, a great curiosity. Nobody's to see it before *you*. So come, please, come."

She assented, and the lad was bounding away, when he halted suddenly:

"Hollo! I'd nearly forgotten half the message—it's Greek. I was to ask you—stop—yes—if you remember where *this* occurs in Euripides?"

ΕΧΙΣ γὰρ πᾶν, ὁδοποιεῖ—

"What's the matter?"

The princess had gone deadly white.

She made no attempt to answer—perhaps she couldn't—but she leaned on Harry's ready arm, and signed faintly her wish to move in the direction indicated.

It was in a pretty glade, where the boys (as Freddy had said) had constructed a bower of green boughs for their master, who was standing outside awaiting the return of his messenger.

As the princess drew near, Queen Mob hobbled from a side-walk, and was making the best of her way to accost her, when Styles interposed.

"Mabel!" he shouted, "at your peril!" (And he shook his fist half playfully at the old hag.) "That's *my* duty."

Then approaching the princess, he took her hand:

"My sweet cousin and fellow-student," he said, cheerfully, "with the greater portion of your sex I

should stand on greater ceremony. I told you once you were no common woman, and as you are aware that I always test my theories by experiment, I now proceed to prove it."

She clasped her hands tightly together, and we saw her lips move. You could hardly hear what she murmured:

"Is Heaven so merciful?"

"'Abide in hope,' " said Styles, inclining his head. "And now, my cousin, since I see the brave heart already in battle order, constant for good and evil, look at me. Come hither, Freddy." He leaned his form, somewhat weakened by his recent illness, on the boy's shoulder, and continued:

"Though not an absolute Hercules, my cousin, I flatter myself I can yet execute some faint and feeble imitation of *one* of that hero's exploits. He, as you are aware, brought back a departed wife; what if I produce something which shall, I trust, shortly prove a living husband?"

He pulled out a branch from the arbour. Down went the entire front like a screen. There stood a noble soldier figure, the cheek a little thin, and deeply browned with many a tropic sun.

"Gordon!"

With no shriek, but that blessed sigh that says so plainly, "Peace at last!" she fell forward into his arms.

That's all.—

There was hardly time for Styles to find out the progress we had made in learning and discipline during his illness, before a certain announcement, issued for daily copy, mysteriously shadowed forth the approach of the third vacation. Inclusive of the verbal comments of the senior boy, to whom the composition of the document had been entrusted, it ran as follows :

“ My dear (*whoever you belong to*),

“ I have the pleasure to inform you that the vacation will commence on the (*tain't fixed*) instant, when I hope to travel homeward by the (*some trap or other*) and to find you, as well as my dear (*if you've got any*) s, in good health.

“ I trust you will perceive a manifest improvement in every branch of my education (*I guess you won't find it out, if there is*), especially in (*anything you feel particularly cheeky about*).

“ School re-opens (*if you're coming back*) on the (*precious deal sooner than I like*).

“ I remain,

“ Your affectionate (*thingumy*),

“ So and So.”

The last three weeks were very jolly. Styles was in high good-humour—pleased with our improvement—praising and thanking us in a manner that induced us to

doubt whether he had ever been made fully acquainted with the open rebellion which had inaugurated the princess's accession. Perhaps he was too well satisfied with the present state of things to refer to the past. Perhaps the princess's gentle influence had outlived her actual presence—for she quitted the house on the day succeeding the fête. At all events, no allusion was ever made to the row, and all went smoothly on to the close of the half.

Queen Mob had grown so affable as to lead to a lively apprehension either that she was becoming deranged, or that her general constitution was giving way under the strain of the unceasing "tantrums" to which it had been for years exposed. She neither growled nor scolded; she called us by our Christian names; she accepted the profuse and florid adoration of the G. P. B.'s, with a confused gratification indescribably absurd.

I am glad to be in a position to record that Harry Maitland bore the *éclaircissement* I have related with a degree of fortitude that surpassed our most sanguine hopes. We who were fondest of the good old chap exchanged many a quiet wink of congratulation as we noticed our schoolfellow's appetite slowly, yet certainly, return. He had at first refused everything that took the form of substantial food. The sight of it appeared to shock him. He was observed to turn away in disgust even from toffee—a thing he had loved; and an officious chap who, against our advice, and with singular absence

of delicacy, persisted in offering Harry a heart-cake, very nearly got a licking for his civility. At last, however, as I have mentioned, a decided improvement became visible, and this encouraged us to get up a little subscription, with which, when it had reached a considerable figure—fourteen and sevenpence—a deputation waited on the convalescent lover, and inquired in what manner it might be laid out most agreeably to himself.

And when Harry replied, like a man,

“Bread, cheese, and a lobster,” it was with difficulty we could suppress a shout of congratulation.

We had a jolly supper that night, I rather think—rather! The festivities were prolonged to as late an hour as was consistent with the personal safety of the revellers, and, what with the excitement and the crumbs in my bed, which, united with the next chap’s, formed the board, I got no sleep at all; for the next was breaking-up day, and the whole room was again astir before dawn.

Everybody was going home this half—I, too. I was anxious to see my dear old governor. There was nobody to tell me anything about him. I could not help fancying him getting better, and inquiring for me, when perhaps they would tell him I had forgotten, or ceased to care for him. We took an affectionate leave of our good old master. He was himself going away for change of air, and we hoped he would never again resume those melancholy garden-visits his illness had

interrupted. I was in the highest possible spirits. I had a letter in my pocket from Old Styles to my step-mother, in which (for he had read it to me) he had spoken highly of my character and conduct; and I had, moreover, a prize given me by Monsieur Poulain—a beautifully bound copy of Pearce Shwozzy,* in gratitude for which I had addressed to him the following couplet:—

Mon cher Monsieur Poulain, adieu !
Je toujours le penser de vous.

Corrected, by that gentleman, to—

Je penserai toujours à vous.

He was a kind old fellow, Poulain, and used to talk to us about his wife—his sweet Elise—and write verses to her, which he set us for a task. One of the fellows saw her. She was like a drayman in petticoats, of morose disposition, and intemperate habits. She always wore a nightcap.

The latter part of my journey had to be performed by coach, and here I made a very agreeable acquaintance—in a stout old gentleman who climbed upon the top, and coolly lifting me from the outer seat on which I had established myself, with my legs hanging over,

* Such was Master Balfour's pronunciation. A distinguished French author, indeed, assures us that no such person as M. "Shwozzy" was ever known in the world of letters. But he suggests that "*Pièces Choies*" might be the work intended!

enjoying a delightful sense of insecurity, put me in the middle, simply remarking that "papa would like that better."

He was very good-natured, and asked me lots of questions about the school, for he somehow knew I was going home for the holidays. Among other things, he inquired whether old "What's-his-name" wasn't a precious tyrant? and when I said he wasn't, patted my shoulder, and said there were worse domestic tyrants than schoolmasters, as he himself knew from recent experience. And thereupon he told us a little story, which, he said, he should write out, if he'd been sent to school and taught to spell in his youth, as a warning to others who might be placed in the same distressing position. If ever he did, he should call it—

"Two Days with a Tyrant."

"Four hours' assiduous study of the page of an abstruse writer, named Bradshaw, interrupted only by an interval long enough to imbibe a cup of strong mocha, and bind a damp handkerchief around my throbbing brow, led me to the conclusion that it was possible to proceed from the Paddington Station of the Great Western Railway to that of Pwylrr-y-Gwllarwddoes, South Wales, within the compass of an autumn day.

"I rose early, and I did it.

"The distance actually traversed was literally nothing

—a poor hundred and seventy miles or so. But the immense number of 'branches,' and of lesser sprays resulting therefrom, combined with the elaborate and artistic non-correspondence of trains, spun out the journey to an affair of some thirteen hours. Why, in the name of common sense, the Gloucester train should arrive punctually at 2.50, and the Ross and Hereford depart from the same station five minutes earlier? or wherefore the latter should, with equal precision, reach its destination only to see the Western Valleys depart, shrieking spitefully, 'Too late! just too la-a-ate!' or lastly, for what reason a certain railway I could name—but I won't—should consume two hours and forty-and-five minutes of man's brief existence in going twenty miles?—these are questions perhaps only to be resolved when some belated bishop, or speculative solicitor, shall demand the public ear. In the meantime, my young friend, they will have little interest for *you*.

"So stealthy had our pace become before reaching Pwylrr-y-Gwllarwddloes, that it ended in our being totally unconscious of standing still. We had arrived, and didn't know it. It was, in truth, only by the guard dashing open the door, and uttering a name that sounded like a violent clearing of the throat, that we were apprised of that welcome fact.

A walk of a mile along a valley, intersected with innumerable tramways, and lit up with mighty furnaces in full blast, brought me to my destination—the house

of a friend, who had medical charge of sixteen thousand stalwart bodies, in temporary bondage to one of the great ironmasters of the district—receiving for the same three halfpence per month per body. Total: twelve hundred pounds per annum: accidents, extra. This, with the general practice of two farm-houses, a beershop, whose customers availed themselves unhesitatingly of the legal permission to be as drunk as they pleased on the premises, and the toll-house, produced a very pretty little income. My friend was, moreover, allowed two horses, with forage corresponding. As for coals, he had full license to dig in any part of his garden he pleased.

“The name of my host was Properjohn—John Properjohn. And rarely, perhaps, has a suggestive patronymic been more happily applied. The orderly and exemplary character of my friend had won him to wife a youthful widow, whom, in virtue of a very distant connexion, I was accustomed to call ‘Cousin Cis.’ She was the freshest and fairest of little matrons. Not even the tyrannical influence to which it will be my painful duty to refer, had been able to chase the smile from her lip, or the healthy pink from her smooth, round cheek, or that pretty dimple, which seemed expressly made for a baby’s lip to fill. In all my life I never saw such milk-white teeth as Cousin Cis’s! (She always said she never used any dentifrice, but soda.) Moreover, she was the idol of that rude district—the bit of gold in the centre of that iron world; and from

the quiet, soothing influence she exercised over those rough tribes, had, in all probability, as much to do with keeping the furnaces in full roar as the greatest ironmaster of them all. I may as well mention that I was once in love with this my Cousin Cis, but I forgot to tell her so, and one morning she married Properjohn.

"To resume my story. On arriving at the house, the door was opened to me, without waiting for a summons, by a man-servant of grave and subdued demeanour. He spoke in a low, cautious key, and appeared to have a habit of glancing up the stairs, as though he were conscious of being watched over the banisters—or as if something was going to make its escape from the house.

'How d'ye do, Benjamin? Dinner over, I suppose?' said I.

"Benjamin smiled compassionately.

'Some time ago, sir.'

'What! hours are changed, then?'

'No, sir. He *always* dines at one,' replied the man, with some severity.

"I opened my eyes, for I had dined some scores of times at my friend's board, and never at an earlier hour than six. But I said no more; and Benjamin, relaxing his dignity, respectfully inquired if I would proceed direct to my apartment, or visit the drawing-room. I chose the latter.

"My pleasant hostess was alone, and came forward,

in her cordial manner, to welcome me. I was grieved to see that she moved across the soft carpet uneasily, as though she had received some injury in her feet. Nevertheless she seemed to wish to anticipate my approach, and met me nearly at the door. To my warm greeting she replied in a broken, smothered tone, which alarmed me still more. As I was about to inquire eagerly the cause of these sad appearances, she stopped me:—

‘He—he has just this moment dropped off,’ she murmured.

‘Dropped off! God bless me! Off what, my dear cousin? Is the hurt serious?’

‘*Hurt*, you odd thing! What do you mean? I say, he has but this very instant gone to seeps, or ——’

‘Where is Seeps?’

‘Sleep! sleep!—or I’d have had him here to say *ga-ga*.’

‘Thank you, my dear cousin. But—I beg your pardon—say *what*?’

‘*Ga-ga. Ga-ga.*’

‘And what’s *ga-ga*? And wherefore should Properjohn say it? And why to *me*? Is it a new Welsh welcome?’

‘Not Properjohn, you tease! It’s tiddlepops.’

‘Tiddlep——!’

‘Baby.’

‘Ha! my little godson. Ha! how is he? A young giant by this time, no doubt. Two years old, is he not?’

‘Oh, cousin!’ said Cis, reproachfully, ‘where’s your memory? Tiddlepops won’t be two till the ninth of next month, and this is only the twenty-seventh! Won’t you like to wash your hands?’ continued my dear cousin, with a little—scarcely perceptible—diminution of her cordiality; ‘and then—unless you would prefer waiting till you have seen him—we will give you some dinner.’

“I elected to dine while the young gentleman was having his seeps out; and then inquired for her husband.

Properjohn had ridden out to the neighbouring village (about ten miles off) of Brynmawr, to purchase a coral for dear baba.

‘Please ’m,’ said Benjamin, who was hovering about the door, ‘nurse says, if Mr. Burkemyoung will take off them boots, and walk up-stairs a-tiptoe, and promise not to go no nearer than the landing, she thinks he can just see his nose.’

“Mr. Burkemyoung, however, declined this proposition, handsome as it was, and accepted the alternative of washing and eating. I was accordingly shown to a comfortless apartment on the ground floor, and, on re-entering the drawing-room, encountered friend Properjohn.

‘Ha! Burkemyoung, old fellow,’ said my jovial friend, ‘what d’ye think of him?’

‘My dear!! *Asleep,*’ said his wife.

‘True, my life. Bless me, I forgot!’ replied Properjohn, with some confusion. ‘Burkemyoung *couldn’t*

have seen him—now, could he?—unless, indeed
By the way, he might have—and I thought, in fact,
he *had*——'

'What, my dear?'

'There's a ladder, dear, against the pear-tree, close
by the nursery window, which is open. I thought,
perhaps, he'd slipped up just to see——'

'Open! You goose, Edward! The window
open!'

"And off flew cousin Cis like a flash of lightning.

"Instead of the pleasant social repast to which I
had been looking forward, I was set down in solitary
state to my dinner, while my excellent friend, who had
dined with his tyrant baby at one, sat and gazed at
me,—a thing I hate. I was dreadfully hungry, but
I never ate so little, or that little at such imminent risk
of choking, in my existence. The meal despatched, I
suspected, from the increasing indifference to noise in
the house, that the baby had awakened. Benjamin's
face, as he came and went in attendance on me, grew
more and more important. At last he re-entered the
room with tenfold dignity, and looking full at me as if
he said,

'Now, sir, collect yourself. He is at hand.
Prepare!'

—— opened the door to its full extent, and admitted
the babine procession.

"First came nurse, walking backwards, partly to

watch over the safety of the interesting tyrant, partly to enjoy fully the effect of the pageant.

"Then mamma, who would not on this occasion delegate her right, bearing the *baby*, excessively got up, and looking like a very heavy roll-pudding insufficiently boiled, and garnished with lace. It had a vicious little eye like a weasel's, and a goblin look that made me feel uncomfortable. I cannot describe it accurately. Can you imagine something compounded of an imp, a rat, and a scorpion? That was baby!

"In reality (nurse-talk and other jesting apart) all babies are personally ugly. I candidly confess I don't like them. Could they, by any adequate arrangement of Nature, be born at two years and a half old, with teeth cut, and intelligence awakened, I shouldn't mind. A child is the sweetest companion; but a formless, feckless lump, all sprawl, and chuckle, and bubble and squeak, ought, in reason, to provoke nothing in adult bosoms but humiliation and pity. Such, at least, are my individual opinions.

"The very ugliest babies are usually tolerated, but this little contrivance was positively *too* bad. It did not fulfil the common conditions of humanity. Its exceeding hideousness shocked my nervous system, as I looked at it, and recoiled.

"One hand was stuck outside the lace in a theatrical manner, which convinced me it was not chance. Babies' hands are said to be exquisitely beautiful (as though

Nature were happier in her imperfections than in her finished work !) and, certainly, if to be pink, and curved, and wrinkly, is sufficient to constitute loveliness, baby's hands were all that could be desired.

“ The nursemaid, carrying a very unnecessary candle, followed next ; and Benjamin, instead of quitting the room, closed up the procession, his eyes still fastened on me, as watching the effect of the scene.

“ I'm a good-natured man enough,—I could not bear to disappoint so many people at once. So I nerved myself to the utmost,—and I may say, without vanity, that the histrionic powers I evinced on this occasion would have put Macready to the blush, and have driven Charles Kean into obscurity, and a knighthood. Ha ! ha ! Dear cousin Cis ! Deluded Properjohn ! Honest Benjamin ! You believed in me ; it is enough !

“ I nourished a fervent hope that baby was either too sleepy or too sulky to go through any tricks to-night. Alas ! not so. The little vicious eyes winked and glowed. The creature opened an orifice in its face, where the mouth is, and aped a human yawn with horrid fidelity.

‘ Isn't *that* pretty ? ’ said my cousin, her kind eyes beaming with delight as the little round orifice closed up again, and a bubble appeared.

“ I expressed my enthusiasm.

‘ Now, dear, say ga-ga.’

... “ A savage squall was the tyrant's sole reply.

‘There—there—he *shan’t!*’ cried the terrified mother. ‘But perhaps he’ll walk. Oh, cousin, he walks so sweetly! you must just see——’

“But here nurse demurred. It was enough for one night that the incomparable infant had displayed his beauty in repose. To-morrow, tiddlepops would do anything he was asked, and surprise us all,—wouldn’t he?

“Squall, went the tyrant,—and was thereupon conveyed to bed.

“*Now*, at last, I hoped we should have a pleasant hour. I had much to say and to hear, and was quite impatient for the door to close on the retreating tyrant. But it didn’t close. Sleeping or waking, he was tyrant still. The door was left ajar. Nurse had gone down to her supper, and, albeit a trusty nursemaid kept guard over the infant treasure, it was clear that the attention of both parents was too much distracted to admit of any rational conversation.

“At the slightest sound, mamma’s voice paused, or sank to a listening tone; and once, when a mouse squeaked behind the wainscot, she fairly started from her chair, as if ready to rush up-stairs.

“Nurse’s supper appeared to be a prolonged one; and at an early hour—fairly tired out—I withdrew to my chamber, really feeling that I was acting most considerably to my good friends in leaving them at liberty to repair on tiptoe to the tyrant’s bedside, and

refresh themselves with one more look before retiring to their own well-deserved repose.

"My host, but not my hostess, appeared at the breakfast-table in the morning.

'Poor Cis has had a dreadful night,' said Properjohn, with a wearied sigh.

"I expressed both grief and surprise (for I had never seen her looking better), and trusted that the attack would prove a slight one.

'Oh, *she's* all right,' said Properjohn. 'It's only the bother. She was up nineteen times with *him*.'

'What's the matter?'

'Flushed, you see. Wakes and turns over; you understand. Keeps opening and shutting his little hand. I don't know what to make of it. We gave him paregoric every thirty-five minutes Several times in the night, the child looked as if he were going——"

"Going!——"

"To cry. Cis is breakfasting in bed,—regularly done—but she will be down in an hour or so.'

"She was. And baby, too.

'He has been talking *so* pretty all the morning, hasn't he, nurse?' said Cis, exultingly.

"Nurse replied, in substance, that his remarks had indeed been both numerous and profound.

"It is probable he had taxed his intellectual and colloquial gifts too highly, for he looked both savage and sullen; but of course I assumed an air of interest, and

endeavoured, in my awkward way, to open an infantine conversation. The little wretch only sucked his apology for a finger, and glared at me. At length—

‘What has he *been* saying?’ I asked in despair.

‘Whole sentences, my dear cousin!’ said his mamma. ‘You never heard such chat. I could not get in a word! What was it he said coming down-stairs, nurse? Ga-ga (say it again, ma’s blessing)—ga-ga, toopid——’

‘Ga-ga, toopid minny tissy,’ prompted nurse.

‘Toopid is his favourite word,’ said Cis. ‘Everything’s toopid—isn’t it, my pet?’

“I began to think it was, and the tyrant toopidest of all.

“Lest you, my boy, should be of the same opinion, I shall not conduct you with me through every hour of this most tedious day. Whether the child had been overdosed with paregoric, or from what other cause, I will not pretend to say; but he would neither speak nor walk, nor, in fact, do anything but suck his finger. This state of things so alarmed the tyrant’s subjects, that domestic business of every kind was suspended, and the energies of all devoted to the one great end of restoring his spirits to their natural querulous tone.

“After some anxious consultation Properjohn mounted his horse, and rode off to visit a brother-doctor at some distance, with the view, as far as I could understand, of taking his opinion how far the prolonged suction of one’s finger is injurious to health; and, assuming that

it be so, what is the gentlest method of removing the digit in question from the abnormal position referred to.

"I hardly know how we passed the morning. I believe I looked a good deal out of the window. It seemed unkind to walk out, and leave my poor cousin alone with her anxieties; and Properjohn did not return for several hours. I might, however, as well have had my walk. Cis only looked in occasionally, with a pale, anxious face—hoped I was amusing myself—and returned hastily to the nursery, where the tyrant was enjoying a placid slumber—his finger still in his mouth. There was, Cis informed me, a very curious appearance on his brow, about as big as *that* (making a mark on paper the size of a very small pin's head), which caused her to be most impatient for her husband's return.

"I offered to ride out and seek him, but this she was too nervous to allow. We had some cold meat during the day, but no regular dinner; and altogether I was truly delighted when evening and Properjohn arrived together—my friend a little ruffled, in consequence of some unfeeling remarks made by the doctor in reply to the questions above stated. But—sighed Properjohn, with Macduff—'He has *no* children!'

"In the meantime, however, the finger had quitted its position; and the spot, as big as *that*, become invisible to mortal mother's eye.

"So ended the first day. The next opened better. It was known that *he* had passed a tranquil night,

mamma having risen only three times and papa twice, to see how he was getting on. We exchanged smiles of congratulation over the coffee, and shook hands more than once during the morning, as though in silent recognition of the gratifying aspect of affairs. I could scarcely help smiling at the interest I myself began to attach to the state of the tyrant's health and temper. I had become infected with the general solicitude and submission; and, had I remained a few days longer under that roof, I am persuaded I should have sunk into as abject a slave as any there. It was not that I liked the child a bit better, but that the love and pity of those amiable people appealed to mine; and what right had I—though with a heart little used to such emotions—to stand selfishly aloof, thwarting and shocking the sensibility I saw around me?

“But my visit was cut suddenly short. We were just preparing for a comfortable stroll, when the nurse, with an aspect I can never forget, burst into the room, and, staggering up to her mistress, threw her arms round her, and cried out:—

‘Oh, please ’m—bear up! bear up!’

‘Bear up!’ shrieked poor Cis. ‘Nurse, is—is he . . . What——?’

‘He—he has—WHOOPED!’

‘My dear Burkemyoung,’ said Properjohn, turning to me, pale as death, but calm and collected as a man should be in great and sudden trouble—‘my very dear

friend, you perceive the terrible dispensation it has pleased Providence to bring upon my domestic peace. I am wholly unfit to fulfil the duties of a host; I cannot—I will not—request you to prolong your present stay. At a happier moment I—I ——’

“The good fellow pressed my hand warmly, and, overcome with emotion, hurried from the room.

“Cis took the hand he had let fall.

‘And, cousin, dear,’ she murmured, the tears bursting from her eyes, ‘you shall yet, please God, hear him say, *ga-ga, toopid*.’

“In that hope I live.”

This little story lasted for several miles, and pleasantly beguiled the way—less indeed by its own interest than the funny, plaintive manner in which the old gentleman recounted his disappointments. Late in the afternoon we drove up to the little inn in the village; and there, to my intense surprise, I found both Mrs. Balfour and Augustus awaiting me. Both received me with the greatest cordiality, my stepmother complimenting me on my growth and general appearance, and Augustus asking innumerable questions about the school, and proposing schemes of amusement for the holidays, in a tone that nearly struck me dumb with astonishment. What could it all mean?

As soon as I could get a chance—for the talk of my amiable connexions had been almost incessant—I inquired eagerly for my father.

He was, Mrs. Balfour replied, much in the same condition as when I last saw him—perhaps a trifle better. Change of air and scene had been urgently recommended by his physicians; and he was now at a quiet, picturesque seaport, in —, in the west, carefully attended to, and, it was hoped, slowly mending. I was greatly disappointed at not seeing him; and, moreover, favourable as the account sounded, there was something in the manner of my stepmother that awoke a chord of suspicion, though to what it pointed I should have found it difficult to say.

Apart from the vague uneasiness I felt on the subject of my dear governor, the six weeks passed pleasantly enough away. Mrs. Balfour was kind, even indulgent; and Augustus, greatly improved in temper and habits, gave me no excuse for a single quarrel. I tried repeatedly to ascertain the geographical position of my dear father's present abode; but though Mrs. Balfour informed me that it was not far from Southampton, had been an important seaport during the Thirty Years' War, and was still a considerable dépôt for the importation of the star and cuttlefish, it is certain I could never detect its name in any map.

I have nothing of interest to relate as having occurred during the holidays, and as my business is rather to tell of Old Styles's, we will return at once to the spot at which, after all, the happiest period of my life was spent. But I'm not so very old yet. Only fifteen.

This next half was marked by a very singular and

melancholy circumstance in regard to one of our masters, some of the particulars of which still remain enveloped in mystery.

Black is not a very pretty name, but it has suited some people capitally, and nobody better than a most extraordinary specimen of humanity presented in the schoolroom, one fine morning, by Styles himself, with the introduction:—

“Gentlemen, the third master, Mr. Black. Junior classics—mathematics—the geography lecture.”

Therewith the master drew from behind him—out of his pocket, as it seemed—an individual about four feet and a half high. Upon my honour, he was like nothing so much as a pair of kitchen-tongs, topped with a human head of more than ordinary size.

Mr. Black was apparently bodiless. He had, indeed, a waistcoat about three inches in length—as an indication of the spot where a body was due—but it formed a mere line or strip between the waistband of his trowsers and his chin. A terrible spinal curvature had, in fact, robbed the poor man of some fifteen inches of his natural height, for his head was massive and finely shaped; he had long, wavy black hair, fine as silk, and grand expressive features, that might have served as a model for a Jupiter. Moreover, there was something in his large brown eyes that at once repressed any inclination to smile at the grotesque little manikin thus abruptly presented to us.

The gesture with which our little friend sealed, as it were, the introduction, lit up his countenance like a pharos; and when he had climbed up the bars of his lofty stool, and was seated, like Humpty-Dumpty, but more securely than that irreparable person, upon an eminence where his want of stature was not manifest, he had the aspect of a Roman senator.

Mr. Black—or, as we preferred to render it, in softer phrase, “*Contrarius albo*”—was an excellent master, the best instructor in mathematics, Styles said, he had ever known. He was possibly as good a classic; but as this department—except as respects the junior boys—was taken by Styles himself, we knew not how far his attainments went. Unlike the other masters, he took pleasure in mingling with the boys during playtime, and passed hours every day pacing up and down the ground, attended by two or three of the biggest chaps he could find, conversing upon every imaginable topic, with such force, facility, and perfect information, that there were plenty of candidates for the notice of the queer little master. There was, moreover, poetry in his composition. A vein of romantic sentiment, which told deeply with us urchins, was perceptible in all his discourses that admitted of it, and some that almost didn’t; for I do believe he could have idealised the *Delectus*, and distilled passion out of Euclid himself!

That he was a poet we knew, for I have still some lines of his, which appeared to have formed the com-

mencement of a piece in which he probably intended to embody some portions of his own personal history. Here is the fragment:—

To mock the idols I have made glory in—
For penance of my great and terrible sin—
To show that hate is deaf, and vengeance blind—
And therein for the teaching of mankind—
Through knowledge, broad and keen, to demonstrate
The curse that on blood-guiltiness doth wait—
To make the heart quake, and the cheek grow pale—
I—Charles Infelix Lyndwode—writ this tale.

In my rose-pleasance, on a sweet forenoon,
The twentieth of a mellow murmuring June,
As I sat idly, setting my fancies free,
Lending what insolent heed sufficed me
To all my subject world of colour and scent,
And to the sweet birds' clamour of content—
And lustrous wings that met i' the air, and played,
And, kissing, lost themselves in velvet shade—
And a low trickle in mosses somewhere hid—
And half-burst buds quivering a rosy lid—
My soul spake up within me, calm and still,—
"This is my heritage, and house of will;
This have I fenced, and belted, and made strong,
And sixteen summers held the curious throng
In maddening doubt, what object bright and rare,
May, with such restless agony of care,
Be shut within!—

Thus have I my desire—
Cut from mankind as with a girdle of fire;
Shunned, marvelled at, suspected, feared, abhorred—
Clothed with strange power—the inaccessible lord.
Here have I wisdom, knowledge, sumptuous state:
All joys that on the delicate senses wait.

These, and two secret treasures worth the whole,
One buried in Burnt-copse, one in my soul.
Yon clowns will have it I to wife have ta'en
A SORCERESS!—bound her in a diamond chain—
Touched her with dazzling ointments, as she stood
Fearfully fair from baths of infant blood,
And pampered with sweet poisonous meats, contrived
For witch-veins only. That, thus grimly wived,
My life—sense—soul—to my strange spouse belong—
Such is their dream . . . *perhaps not wholly wrong.*
As thus I mused, with half-completed smile,
And, inly dreaming, rent a rose the while—

* * * * *

There were several peculiarities about Contrarius. In the first place, we noticed he could never endure to be *alone*. In school, or playtime, he was always among us. At night, he lingered in the dormitory, talking with the elder boys; and when at length withdrawn to his own room, would leave his door ajar, and pace quietly up and down, as if delighting in the sound of human voices, though he could not catch the purport of our discourse.

Then he was at all times eager and restless, as if impatient of a moment's mental inaction; and carried this so far, that in the necessary pauses of a conversation, while waiting the reply of his interlocutor, he would stamp and mutter to himself, frequently uttering words which could have no connexion with the subject, and which not a little startled and puzzled those who caught them!

Twice a week he used to walk out by himself, and

remain absent about three hours. Nobody knew the object of these excursions, from which he usually returned looking pale, agitated, and exhausted, but restless as ever. It was clearly not for the enjoyment of his own society. *That* he could not bear. Yet we ascertained, accidentally, that he always selected the very loneliest path in the neighbourhood—a green lane leading nowhere, unless to two or three miserable cottages; and, by a short cut, seldom trodden by any but a poacher's foot, to a strange old mansion which few people knew except by name. It was called "Hearts Hall," or, more commonly, "Hearts."

I shall tell you a little about it.

Hearts—as Miss May will bear me out in asserting—are subject to innumerable, and sometimes very remarkable, changes. The mansion bearing this interesting name had certainly fulfilled the conditions attached to it. Few country-houses of its years (they did not exceed two centuries and a half) had seen so chequered, so distinguished, and at the same time—I am distressed to add—so unprincipled a career. Built originally by a quiet old Quaker, who had made his fortune by the sale of Dutch dolls, the earlier years of Hearts went by as pleasantly, and, no doubt, as unimpeachably, as did those of the well-known Thalaba, who is always bragging of the felicity that attended his youth.

No shadow of reproach, or even of suspicion, attached

to this orderly and exemplary period. Long, however, before the winter winds found strings enough for their wild harpings among the elms and chestnuts planted by the first proprietors, the staid reputation I have alluded to had given place to dark rumours and darker mystery; and before the first ivy-tod had succeeded in peeping into my lady's lattice, Hearts had lent the shelter of its reverend grey walls to deeds and circumstances which may not be recorded without a shudder and a pang.

It had been the rendezvous of a political conspiracy. It had been the scene of a dismal murder. It had been the cradle of a college of Jesuits. A learned physician of the Preissnitz persuasion—tempted by its seclusion and excellent supply of water—next established himself, his pumps, and his patients, on the spot; but the decease of the majority of the latter, followed by that of the excellent practitioner himself, changed it, by a transition somewhat less abrupt than usual, to a madhouse.

A fire, occasioned by the carelessness of a tipsy matron, dispersed the inmates of this last-mentioned establishment in the wildest terror. It was in the depth of a winter's night, and, for some weeks thereafter, every bumpkin in the neighbourhood found himself—to his equal surprise and embarrassment—in the position of host to at least *one* lunatic visitor. A protracted squabble with the assurance offices prevented the re-occupation of the mansion by the burnt-out tenants, and

it remained vacant—melancholy—and, as it were, out at elbows—for nearly twenty years.

At the end of that period the rats and owls, who had insidiously extended their encroachments until their hordes nearly overran the entire territory, suddenly received notice to retire within their natural limits; and this order being enforced by means of a body of masons, carpenters, and artificers, cunning in internal decoration, the place was completely repaired, and restored to its original aspect.

The new occupants were known to be an old Indian officer, Sir Lewin Latymer, and his young and beautiful wife; and that was about as much as *was* known, for they were seldom or never seen.

What, you will ask, has all this about Hearts to do with our poor little master? It lay near the line of his walks, and that's all. Why he preferred that direction was a secret known only to himself. Did he visit anybody? Was it possible that the poor, deformed little man, was in love with some rustic beauty? There was nothing, as I have already said, but some wretched little tumble-down cottages—and only two or three of those—tenanted by the very lowest class of labourers. Could the refined intellect of our master have stooped to such bondage? 'Twas odd enough. Our attention became irresistibly attracted to the subject. We snuffed a romance, and perused the working features of the little man as, hot and weary, he sat down after these excursions

to his desk, as though we could glean from them the particulars of the first volume.

One thing was to be observed. Neither bodily fatigue nor mental suffering ever betrayed him into the slightest neglect of his duties. Neither in body nor in spirit was he ever absent during school-hours. He pressed the tasks with a vigour and earnestness that would have rendered him a valuable ally of Queen Stork had he flourished during that brief and brilliant dynasty, and it was evident that he stood high in Old Styles's favour.

One day an event occurred. It was a day long and long remembered. It was a sultry afternoon in early summer—for the lilacs and laburnums were out, and sent a faint fragrance through the open doors and windows from the garden we could not see. The drowsy murmur of the school was enough to send any heavy-headed chap fairly to sleep. Lots of us were regularly nodding over our books. We had had roast beef and Yorkshire pudding for dinner; and I—Cæsar in hand—was just thinking, half asleep, what a bore the Romans must have voted it, to have to fight after dinner, especially if they had had Yorkshire pudding, when a low tap was heard at the door. Nobody answered, of course, as Styles did not. It was repeated.

"Come in," said Styles, sharply and suddenly. I declare I think he had been in a half-doze himself.

The door opened, and in came a boy of very singular

aspect. I never set eyes on such a boy. I winked and rubbed those organs to be quite certain he was real. He had an overhanging forehead; he squinted fearfully with one eye, and had a brown scar, which elongated the other to a hideous degree. His nose was nearly flat, and he had a hare lip which displayed some glistening fangs, as though in a perpetual snarl. He looked, judging from size, about fourteen, but his face was altogether of a kind to baffle conjecture, and might have belonged (if such a being may exist) to a prematurely-aged hobgoblin.

He went lolloping up to the nearest desk. The boys seated at it half rose, as if instinctively acting on the defensive,—and no wonder!—so truculent and threatening was the intruder's manner.

"Who is he? What does he want?" thundered Styles.

The boy looked luridly up, and—his eye flickering in an opposite direction—held up towards Styles a small letter.

"Well, sir, bring it hither," said the master, impatiently. "Now, gentlemen, what are you all staring at? Is that Herodotus ready?"

The hideous urchin had meanwhile obeyed his mandate. Styles took the letter carelessly, and was in the very act of breaking the seal, when a sudden movement of Mr. Black's chair caused him to raise his head. Again looking at the letter, he, apparently for the first time, noticed the address.

"Mr. Black, I beg your pardon," he said. "I had nearly made myself master of your secrets, well secured as they are." And he exhibited a seal nearly as big as the letter.

Those who looked at the little master at this moment were shocked at the change that had come over him. His face was perfectly livid. His hands were clenched. His lips moved as if he tried to smile or speak, but could do neither.

Styles, however, did not seem to notice this, but, giving the note to one of the boys, desired him to take it to Mr. Black; then, turning to the ugly messenger, inquired if he was directed to await an answer.

"Ye-es," said the boy, with a guttural laugh, "there's an answer, sure enough. But I'm not to bring it—not such a fool!"

Styles pointed to the door, and the boy stumped out, banging it after him, however, with such evident intention, that Styles, enraged, directed that he should be followed and brought back. There was a momentary hesitation, for the master had not named any one of us in particular; and, somehow, no one liked the job. Several eyes were directed towards the big Creole, Christian Hohné, whose place was near the door, and Christian felt it incumbent on him to go. Two other fellows accompanied him, and the pursuit commenced. To our astonishment, nearly ten minutes elapsed. At last, back came Christian and his myrmidons, heated and bewildered, but without their prey, and reported that, not

finding him in the passage, as they expected, they had dashed full speed through the house, and out at the front door on to the high road, which could be commanded, in either direction, for at least a quarter of a mile. He was not to be seen!

A servant-maid had, it appeared, observed him pass along the gallery. He must, therefore, have quitted the house by the usual entrance, but to have got out of view within the brief space that followed was more than mortal legs could manage. There was something odd and out-of-the-way about the whole occurrence. The puzzled expression of the pursuers' faces almost made us laugh. Styles himself looked queer, and scratched his nose thoughtfully with the feather-end of his pen.

All this while, I must mention, the little master, who had read his letter, sat motionless, gazing straight before him at the blank wall, with a countenance pale as death.

Though this incident had roused us from our drowsy stupor, it did not improve our disposition for study. The extraordinary aspect and bearing of the boy—the effect of the letter upon Mr. Black—and, lastly, the messenger's mysterious disappearance, combined to excite our curiosity to the utmost. The romance was, indeed, improving! We began to form the wildest conjectures. One daring youth boldly avowed his belief that the boy was no boy at all; but an imp—or a gnome—or a satyr—and that it would have been impossible,

or inexpedient, to punch his head, had they caught him!

Styles, who had got up once or twice, and sat down again, now rose and addressed us.

"Gentlemen, I know not how it may be with *you*; I have done my best, and I candidly confess *I* cannot do my work to-day, in any fitting manner" (*murmurs of congratulation*). "Mr. Sibley, how are your classes? Is there much in arrear?"

Mr. Sibley, who had himself indulged, at intervals, in a peaceful doze, reported favourably to the utmost limit of his conscience.

"It is some time since we have allowed ourselves any departure from the regular routine," continued Styles. "Let the remainder of the day be a holiday. *Reddite libros.*"

With a joyous cheer, the school dispersed in a second. We left the little master seated at his desk, in the same attitude, and we never saw him again. Nobody ever did—except But let me go on regularly.

When tea-time came, and no little master, we were certainly surprised. But when, at bed-time, he had not returned, there was something like alarm. Inquiry showed that he had availed himself of the half-holiday to take his accustomed solitary walk; but, beyond that, nothing was known. So Mr. Sibley, who came in his place to take away our candle, assured us.

We lay awake later than usual that night, talking.

Somehow, the little man had got possession of a larger share of our regard than we had imagined; and the idea of some misadventure having befallen him grew painfully upon our minds. His room-door stood ajar as usual, but there was no sound of little steps pacing to and fro; and, above all, no cheerful "Good-night, my boys," as he would reluctantly close the door upon the last two talkers.

I had never seen Old Styles look more troubled than when, on entering the schoolroom on the following morning, he glanced at the master's vacant chair. Beckoning to Mr. Sibley, and to three or four of the seniors, he held with them a sort of council, the result of which was the despatching the said individuals in various directions, while Mr. Sibley, charged to examine his colleague's desk and room, reported everything as usual, without any indication of a purposely-prolonged absence.

All inquiries proved fruitless.

After the lapse of a day or two, Styles became so anxious, that, besides reporting the matter to the local magistrates, he wrote to London, requesting the attendance of an experienced detective, to assist the investigation. Scarcely had he done so, before he received an anonymous letter, of a very curious kind. It was written in a beautiful female hand, firm and flowing, as if disdaining disguise; and it directed him, in an imperative manner, to suspend efforts which, he was assured, could

lead to no result, except such as might be dangerous to *himself*! (Old Styles smiled at that.) The missing man, it was stated, had quitted England, never to return, and desired no more than that his name should be forgotten, his effects of every kind destroyed, and the circumstance of his having ever appeared in the neighbourhood buried in profound oblivion.

"Cool hand, this!" said Mr. Sharpham, of the detectives, as Styles read him the letter.

"But what do you say to *this*?" asked our master, as he pointed to the foot of the page, where there appeared, in characters unmistakably genuine,

"I approve of the above."

"G. BLACK."

The officer paused, and screwed up his lips.

"We'll see about it," he said.

Mr. Sharpham did see about it. He devoted himself, body and mind, to the solution of the mystery. For the week or ten days he remained with us, I don't think he took, at any one time, more than two hours' repose. But nothing came of it. A closer scrutiny of poor Mr. Black's desk disclosed nothing that could throw light on the business. There was, indeed, a packet of letters, apparently of old date, some in a female hand, signed "Laura"—some in his own—copies of replies. Of these I shall speak hereafter. They were sealed up for the present, with his other effects, while efforts were made—without success, however—to discover his rela-

tions or friends. Of the note delivered to him by the mysterious boy, no trace could be found. As for the messenger himself—as no one professed any knowledge of such a person—his description was printed, and a reward offered for his production. The like ill-success attended this measure; the general impression seeming to be that a creature, such as that described in the hand-bill, had never been seen at all, out of a caravan.

Of course, Mr. Sharpham had included in his circle of inquiry the tenants of the few poor cottages I have mentioned, as lying on the retired track chosen by Mr. Black for his melancholy walks. But nothing was elicited calculated in the remotest degree to connect them with the mysterious disappearance. As for the proud, secluded inhabitants of Hearts, nobody ever thought of troubling *them*. But old Sir Lewin, hearing—goodness knows how—of what was now beginning to be called the “murder,” sent word to Mr. Sharpham that any local information, or assistance of any kind, his establishment could afford, was entirely at his disposal.

At length, however, the experienced officer admitted that he was completely at fault, and had never succeeded in obtaining the slightest glimmering of a clue to the mystery. With this announcement he quitted the neighbourhood, to try, as he told Mr. Styles privately, another course of action.

What this might be, I never knew—but I doubt whether it would have led to much, had it not been for

what the wise call a coincidence—the superstitious a warning—and I . . . a very rum thing.

Hester Moggs, the slatternly kitchen-maid, fell suddenly into a very nervous and desponding state. It was next to impossible to augment the neglect and disorder which habitually distinguished Hester's attire, but she refused her beer. That was a bad sign enough, but when it was observed that she could not even relish her tea, the cook became seriously alarmed, and fearing she might be meditating some rash act, took away her garters at night, and locked the door.

Hester's melancholy increasing, Queen Mob was appealed to, and through that lady's energetic interposition the girl was induced to confess that she had had a dream—a terrible dream. If she had only had it once, she wouldn't have minded it the snuff of a candle; but it had come *three times*—and always just the same.

Poor Mr. Black (Hester didn't know why he come to *her*—she had always swep' his room out properly, and had never spoken to him in her life) had appeared to her in her sleep—gazed upon her with a ghastly and distorted face—and then, turning his head aside, exhibited a wound which had lopped away the left ear, and left the side of the head, the neck, and shoulder “matted,” as Hester said, with blood.

The cook corroborated Hester to the extent that the latter had made some slight mention of this first dream. Concerning the second, which was in all respects similar,

Hester had preserved an alarmed silence. Ditto, as to the third. But, *here*, the girl was haunted with an idea that the apparition had addressed some word or words to her. Sometimes she thought she could recall them—sometimes not. They were uttered in a broken, melancholy tone—

Like hoarse night-gusts, sepulchral briers among.

But Hester Moggs had never read Keats, and described the accents simply as “choky like.” The word or words, however, constantly escaped her.

Now, just at this point of the conversation, it happened that a brown-paper parcel was brought in and presented to Queen Mob. It was from a tradesman in the town, and contained some garments for a little chap in the school.

Queen Mob opened it carelessly.

“Searle’s clothes,” she remarked.

Hester Moggs uttered a piercing scream :

“Searle’s clothes! Searle’s clothes!” shrieked the girl. “*Them was the very words.*”

And she burst into hysterical tears.

“Searle’s clothes!” repeated her astonished mistress.

“What, in the name of common sense, can Searle’s jacket and trowsers have to do with poor Mr. Black?”

Hester confessed she did not know; but averred, most solemnly, that these, and none others, were the words she had heard. Styles himself sent for the girl,

talked to her in his calm, grave manner, and restored her mental equilibrium (such as it was): still, nothing could induce her to alter her story—that “Searle’s clothes” were the mysterious words she had heard in her dream.

Here was a new enigma, of which nobody ventured any solution. Another day or two elapsed, when the cook, finding herself one morning *tête-à-tête* with the milkman, detailed to him in confidence Hester’s dream.

The milkman was a thoughtful and sagacious man. He put his hand to his chin. After a minute’s meditation—

“I have been trying to remember something, Mrs. Besley,” said the milkman, “and I—I think—yes, I am *sure*,” he added, briskly, clapping one hand into the palm of the other, “that I have it. There is a place—I’m not quite sure of the ground—nor that I could find it in a month, but it’s somewhere in the neighbourhood of Hearts Hall, that went, years ago, by the name of ‘Searle’s Close.’ It’s a lonesome dismal spot as ever you see, and lies so off of everything, that it’s very name’s forgot in these parts. *That’s* the place he was a talking of, poor gentleman! and not a boy’s breeches, Mrs. Besley, and there, depend upon it, *something* will be found.”

And he clanked away with his cans.

The cook sunk upon a chair, and faintly summoned Hester, to whom, and to Queen Mob and Styles,

the milkman's idea was successively made known. Styles looked incredulous enough; nevertheless he thought the circumstances sufficiently remarkable to merit attention, and decided that, were it only to satisfy the servants' disturbed minds, the scrutiny should be made.

Accordingly the same evening, our master having engaged the attendance of a couple of the rural police, proceeded, in company with a gentleman of the neighbourhood, in the direction of Hearts Hall. They were presently joined by a rough-looking individual, with a countenance half shy, half surly, like a newly-tamed savage, whom one of the officers introduced to the notice of the gentlemen as "Hatsey Young," the biggest poacher in the country.

"But I an't *caught* him yet," added the policeman, aloud, "and I hope I mayn't. He can get work when he has a mind to, and he's got a mother to keep. If he's nabbed, she'll go to the worcus."

"It's that 'ere dog that does it," said Hatsey, giving a backward kick in the direction of a wicked-looking cur that followed him. The animal had lost one paw in a gin, half one ear in a difference with a badger, and was altogether the very impersonation of canine vice and the evils which attend it. "He's always a runnin' into the coverts—and I a'ter him, of course. He'd clear Randal Wood in a week—if I didn't—he would."

The officer only smiled, and informed Styles that

Hatsey knew every hedge, stick, and stone in that part of the country, and would earn his first honest half-crown for some weeks past, by conducting them to the spot once known as "Serle's Close."

The party thus constituted, took the direction of Hearts, passed the green lane and cottages, and presently cutting across a fallow field, turned to the right, and skirted a piece of dense coppice covering the base of a low eminence.

Suddenly Hatsey stopped.

"In *here*, gentlemen, please."

The wood was really so thick as to seem almost impenetrable without cutting an entrance; but Hatsey, seizing an armful of thornbush as though it had been lavender, pulled it aside and disclosed a passage. It had the appearance of a path, long disused, and grew wider and wider till it opened into a space of cleared ground, in what appeared the very heart of the wood, for the surrounding and overhanging trees made it almost dark as night, though it wanted an hour of sunset.

"Serle's Close, gentlemen," said Hatsey. "'Twas twice as big when I was a boy, but the wood have grown in. It belongs to Hearts. I've heard say there was a right o' way through it once, but as it didn't lead nowheres, and wasn't no use to anybody, the parish sold it for a lump of money to the last properrioter."

It was, in truth, the very place for a deed of violence.

The voices of the party sounded hollow, as in a cellar. Without any delay, they proceeded to examine the spot most minutely; Hatsey's three-footed dog hobbling and snuffing after them, as though to make quite sure. Nothing, however, was found of a nature to excite suspicion, and the party were on the eve of retiring from the dismal spot—Styles half-annoyed at having lent even a qualified belief to the suggestions of Hester's fancy—when Smouch, the dog, uttered a low whimper, and plunged his nose viciously into a tuft of rank grass near the foot of a tree.

"That's '*good*,'" said Hatsey. "Some'at there. Hold 'n, good dog."

Smouch lay down—but without 'holding' him—seeming to content himself with intently contemplating whatever he had found, his eye glowing in the deep shadow like a little red lamp.

Hatsey, who appeared to notice something unusual in the animal's deportment, now went up to him, and parted the tuft with his foot. Nothing was visible; still the dog remained immovable. Seeing this Hatsey kneeled down, and made a closer examination. After a few moments he drew back his head, as though stung by an adder, and leaped to his feet.

"See here, gentlemen—here! What would you call *this*?" he said, pointing to something in the grass, just clear of the dog's snout.

All stooped down, and distinguished a small shrivelled object in the middle of the tuft.

"'Tis a man's ear!" cried Hatsey.

There was no question of it. In spite of the gathering darkness, there was no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that this morsel of withered flesh had once adorned a human head, and on this apparent corroboration of Hester's vision the search was recommenced, the officers lighting their lamps for the purpose.

They had examined every inch of ground in the open space, and its immediate vicinity, and were for the second time about to discontinue the search. Styles was leaning, fatigued, against a large beech.

"What time does the moon rise?" asked his friend.

Styles glanced up mechanically towards the sky, and, the next instant, started from the tree.

"Look *there*!" he said, grasping his companion's arm, and pointing upwards at the boughs. "The light—the light! Higher—higher!"

The officers directed the united power of their lanterns towards the place indicated.

Higher than the first division of the tree—at least twenty-five feet from the ground—there hung a human body. Though scarcely bigger than a child's, and but indistinctly visible in the flickering light, there was no mistaking it. It was indeed that of our poor little master.

Now I've nothing to say about the "coincidence." I can only tell you the *fact*. I don't say that Hester Moggs—who was born and bred in the neighbourhood—might not in her infancy have heard the name of

Serle's Close, and even then have associated the dismal precinct with ideas of crime and terror. I don't know. But there are scores of such coincidences, and if ghost-stories were now-a-days allowed to be told in a witness-box you would hear some sworn depositions that might startle you; aye, of crimes that, in all human likelihood, would never have been discovered but for that very "coincidence," which is nevertheless refused the seal of authenticity, because it's so strange.

If you'll forgive my breaking off for a moment in the story of poor Mr. Black, I'll tell you a curious "coincidence" of late years, that happened in the experience of an uncle of mine, Colonel W —, while serving with the British Legion, under Evans, in Spain.

There had been a severe action with the Carlists, near Andoain. The principal fighting took place among some large orchards, the trees of which were, at that season, loaded with magnificent fruit. Here the British lost a number of men. Still, when the action closed, they were about two miles in advance of their former position.

Now my uncle, though greatly fatigued, discovered that he could not sleep a wink that night in his bivouac, and at length resolved to take his horse, and, though out of his line of duty, visit an outlying picket at the distance of half a league. On the way he encountered Major C. Vane, field-officer of the day, returning from visiting the post, who reported, laughing, "All well," and invited my

uncle to return and take some supper. An unaccountable impulse, nevertheless, induced him to go on.

Arriving within sight of the picket he rode up towards the nearest sentry, whose form he plainly distinguished standing in an attitude of eager, listening attention, the moonlight glittering upon the bright barrel of his musket, which he held grasped in both hands, as though for present use.

Although my uncle drew near enough to recognise the features of the man—an Irishman, noted in the regiment for his pluck—the latter neither uttered the usual challenge, nor changed his stedfast attitude. My uncle rode still closer. No movement. He passed directly in front of him. No salute; no challenge! His eyes were opened to their widest extent, his lips moving, his face streaming with perspiration.

My uncle dismounted, and, walking up to the man, put his hand on his shoulder.

“Are you drunk, sir—mad—or dreaming?”

“Neither, colonel,” was the prompt reply; but his teeth chattered as he spoke. He must have recognised my uncle’s voice, for the direction of his eyes had never changed. “Neither—— But *there* stands Giddy (Gideon) Grey, that was knocked over this morning in the orchard. And there he’s been standing these twenty minutes, swearing ’tis a burnin’ shame that he’s not to be decently buried like the rest.”

“Nonsense, man!” said my uncle. “Parties were

sent back to bring up the wounded, and bury all the dead that could be found."

"I know it, colonel," gasped the still agitated man. "But Giddy's saying he was killed under an apple-tree, that the boughs was heavy with fruit, and some of the same grape that hit *him* swept down a great branch, that concealed his body. So there he's lying, still—at least he would be, if he wasn't *here*," concluded the bewildered sentry. "And—and——" he added, presently, "he wants you, if you please, to send back and bury him."

My uncle caused the man to be relieved, and sent him to the bivouac; then, taking a couple of men with him, rode back to the spot indicated. There—under a tree whereof a wounded branch, still laden with huge red apples, trailed heavily upon the ground—they found Giddy Grey with a grape-shot in his heart.*

To return to my story. At the inquest upon the remains of poor Mr. Black, the medical evidence proved that he had been struck by an axe, or other heavy sharp instrument, on the head. The stroke, however, had proved less deadly than was probably intended, cutting off the ear, and wounding superficially the neck and shoulder. The blow was not repeated; but it would seem that the unfortunate victim was

* This incident really occurred, as narrated, in Spain; the officer referred to being the gallant Brigadier-General Woolryche, lately in command of the German Legion.

dragged forward a few steps to the nearest tree, and hung where he was discovered. No clue whatever was obtained to the perpetrators of the foul deed of blood, and the jury were compelled to return a verdict attributing the crime to parties unknown.

I have said that a packet of letters was found in the little master's desk. At first, these had appeared to be of comparatively little importance, inasmuch as they were dated several years back, and proved no more than that poor Mr. Black had enjoyed no immunity from the shafts of Cupid. He had formed an attachment, apparently of the most passionate kind, to a lady whose replies (signed "Laura") certainly seemed to intimate a return of his affection.

But these carefully-treasured notes formed in reality the first portion of as fearful a narrative as ever blackened the page of domestic life. I will relate it in as few words as possible, and divide it into two parts—that which was gleaned from the letters I have referred to, and that which, one year subsequently, was furnished to Mr. Styles in a singular manner, and threw light upon the whole.

From the letters, then, the following particulars were either ascertained or reasonably conjectured:—

Mr. Black (whose real name was Brandreth) belonged to a family of high respectability in the West of England. He was in easy circumstances, if not rich—had travelled far and wide—and mixed as much with society

at home as the shyness resulting from a sense of his unhappy deformity permitted. Even this, however, was too much for the poor man's peace; for it was on one of these occasions that he first beheld the person whose image was destined thenceforth to mingle with every thought of his heart.

The lady must have been at this period about nineteen. She was without other dowry than her charms; and as she had already refused as many offers as she was years old, it is probable she really was—in personal beauty, at least—not undeserving of the homage paid her by her strange little lover. This homage was offered in an unusual manner. Many months had passed, and yet Mr. Brandreth had never opened his lips to the lady of his affections. How, then, you will ask, was his passion revealed to her?—In this wise.

Brandreth and the young lady were both present at a rural fête given by a rich resident in the county. The party was to be repeated in three weeks' time; and it was pleasantly agreed that every one of the male guests present should compose a copy of verses allusive to the pleasures of the day, and those who had participated therein. The contributions were to be anonymous, and would be read aloud in turn by lottery.

The compact was observed with a rather unusual fidelity. Various degrees of applause rewarded the efforts of the unpractised bards: but one poem, signed "B.," and addressed to "Laura," told so strongly upon the

feelings of the audience, that it was, by universal desire, read a second time, not only commanding breathless silence, but even the tears of some portion of the listeners.

The party to whom it was addressed was, to all appearance, the only individual unmoved. But for a slight augmentation of colour, you would not have suspected her of taking the remotest interest in the matter. But Laura's heart was deep and still, and what passed within that council-chamber was rarely telegraphed through cheek or eyes. While the other guests thought her indifferent, she was surrendering her whole soul to the witchery of the impassioned verse. While others recognised in the composition refined sentiment and faultless melody, Laura knew it to be the outcall of a heart quivering with the joyful pain of a first—and perhaps not hopeful—love. Closing her glorious eyes, she sat motionless, drinking in every syllable like delicious wine, till she had almost shared in the intoxication of the writer.

But who was *he*? She was well acquainted with the greater part of the company present. As soon as she had fully recovered her self-command, Laura held a little review in her own mind. She suspected several, but could not convict the culprit to her own satisfaction. Upon *one* her thoughts dwelt longer than she herself approved; for, while conscious of a hope that her suspicion might be confirmed, she also remembered that,

with a thousand opportunities, he had never afforded her the slightest *other* ground for believing that he loved her.

The name of this person was Bernard St. George. He was strikingly handsome, with a frank, engaging manner, that rendered him popular with both sexes; and a fund of accomplishments that placed him far above the usual average. He was one of those men who seem to do everything so easily, that one wonders they do nothing after all! Laura stood a little in awe of him, as a sort of recumbent genius that might at any moment stand up and dwarf you into nothing with its stature. She knew already that he was a bard of no mean flight, and (to cut the matter short) Miss Laura passed a resolution in her mind that "B." stood for Bernard; and, having done so, broke up the council.

Some days now passed, during which poor Laura, haunted with emotions she had never before experienced, yielded up her thoughts more and more to the conviction that had possessed her. She had no very intimate friend of her own age, and the old aunt with whom she lived was not one to whose judgment she was disposed to submit the counsels of her heart. She resolved—perhaps hastily—to discover for herself both the author and the object of the mysterious poem. Chance assisted her.

A weekly provincial paper—after duly recording the incidents of the fête—referred its readers to another

page, wherein was given at full length the poem signed "B."

In the succeeding number the notices to correspondents contained the following:—

"A communication for "B." awaits him at our office."

Peeping over Mr. Brandreth's shoulder that evening, we find him reading—and reading again—these words:—

"I have no adviser—scarcely a protector—in the world. Wonder less, then, that I speak and act for myself. If your expressions are truthful, why disguise them in the hypocrisy of verse? If false, how dare you make *me* their subject?—**LAURA.**"

Of the reply to this, no copy seemed to have been retained. But that the lover *did* reply, there could be no shadow of a doubt. He must have poured out his love without stint; and deepened by his passionate eloquence, if it were possible, the impression his poetry had already made. For the rejoinder was all that poet or lover could desire. Here are extracts:—

"I cannot better describe to you the yoke you have cast upon my mind than by bluntly telling you I believe every word you say! You affirm that you have loved me for fifteen months. Indifference was never more

skilfully simulated. Still, I believe. You tell me that to love me, even hopelessly, is to you a more acceptable destiny than the power of subjugating *any* hearts you will. Even that flight of fancy I accept and believe. . . . In truth, I am so changed that I scarcely know myself. Pride and reserve are gone. My heart rebels against itself, and my fingers, like cowed slaves, execute its mad decrees . . . May Heaven forgive you if the spell you have laid upon me is for evil! But beware how you trifle with the spirit you have raised."

The lover saw more than sufficient in his mistress's language to encourage his continuance of the correspondence; and—to cut short this part of the story—the pair seem to have yielded themselves up entirely to the fascination of their singular passion. Letters succeeded each other rapidly; and this lasted over several months, during which poor Mr. Brandreth revelled in a perfect delirium of joy.

But how was this to end? Hitherto he had successfully preserved his incognito . . . When she should know *what* it was she loved—— It was a reflection on which he would not suffer himself to dwell.

An explanation was, nevertheless, inevitably approaching. He had more than once endeavoured to prepare her, in some degree, for the shock she must experience; but she usually treated these allusions (no doubt, sufficiently obscure) with indifference and im-

patience: so much so as sometimes to have whispered a secret hope—a faint suspicion—that she was *not* so profoundly ignorant of the identity of her lover, and was willing to reassure him. No, that was too wild a hope. And yet, again, what was too much to hope from such a mind and heart as Laura's?

Willingly would the poor little hunchback have prolonged this season of doubt. But time inexorably drew on. In one of her letters Laura hazarded a gentle reproach for his presumed neglect of an opportunity afforded by a party, at which she reminded him they had both been present. Brandreth had *not* been among the guests; and the positive certainty that she had thus been dwelling upon a false idea—though no more than what the unhappy little man ought to have suspected months before—struck him like a thunderbolt.

He would not increase his error by any longer delay. He wrote on the instant, and, acknowledging he had not been present on the occasion referred to, at least dispelled the illusion under which she laboured.

Here followed a pause in the correspondence. She had received the first shock, and had to combat a bitter disappointment. She overcame it, however. It ought not to have been difficult. Beyond his good looks and his accomplishments, there was little in Bernard St. George to enchain a woman's regard. After a brief interval she returned to her invisible worshipper, and that with a frankness that might have raised him

to the seventh heaven of delight had it not been coupled with a delicate hint, that, to prevent the risk of any farther errors, their intercourse must take a personal form, or cease. Their meeting must be in public. She gave him permission to accost her in the presence of her friends.

Brandreth had no resource but to obey.

They met.

Of the particulars of this dreaded event the letters furnished nothing. Either Brandreth had over-estimated the shock Laura was likely to experience, or the lady had put a very strong restraint upon herself, or, what is after all most probable, the mental endowments of the little man had won upon her to such an extent as to render the charm proof against any revulsion of feeling caused by the shock to her taste. At all events, his succeeding letters evince nothing but gratitude and joy. The little hunchback is the accepted lover of the haughty beauty of the West. What is more, *they were married.*

Thus much was gathered from the first portion of the discovered correspondence. It was about a twelve-month after the tragedy I have related, that the remainder of the history became known in manner following:—

When it had been found impossible to trace Mr. Brandreth's relations or friends, that portion of his small effects which consisted of clothes, linen, &c., had been distributed among a number of destitute persons in the

neighbourhood, one of whom thus found himself in possession of a thickly-quilted dressing-gown, frequently worn by our poor little master. Examining his prize with great minuteness, and fancying he noticed something thicker than the wadding, he presently discovered an inner breast-pocket sewn up, and, ripping it open, found a packet of letters and papers closely written. These he at once brought to Mr. Styles.

The papers consisted of both letters and memoranda, and their contents brought down the history to the period of the appearance of poor Brandreth under the name of Black, in the character of master, at the school.

It appeared that, immediately after their marriage, the strangely assorted pair proceeded to France and Switzerland, where they passed nearly two years. Now the sky began to blacken. A change had come over the lady. Whether the mortifications she could hardly fail sometimes to experience in the escort of her grotesque little lord, had gradually alienated an affection not founded originally on the strongest principles, or from what other reason, none can know. They separated, and she returned to England alone. The great-hearted dwarf had settled everything he possessed in the world upon her, excepting only what might suffice him for a bare subsistence. But, like the greater treasures of his unbounded love, *this* likewise came to shipwreck, the treachery of one who held the property in trust depriving Mrs. Brandreth of almost everything.

Left in poverty, and unprotected—lovelier than ever in person, and only twenty-three—the lady at this period made the acquaintance of a rich old Indian officer, recently returned to England—Sir Lewin Latymer—who, conceiving her to be a widow—an impression in which many of her friends participated—made his proposals in due form.

There was, I believe, some ground for believing that she herself partook of the conviction that her husband was dead in reality, as he had long been, by agreement, dead to *her*. Nothing had been heard of him, and he had ceased even to draw the scanty allowance he had reserved for his own wants. At all events, Mrs. Brandreth yielded to the eager instances of her wealthy admirer; and, without communicating to him the circumstances in which she was placed, suffered herself to be conducted to the altar, and transformed into Lady Latymer.

Brandreth was *not* dead. Neither was he ever, for more than a brief interval, in ignorance of her position and movements. His love had survived both the change in her feelings and demeanour, and the shock of her desertion, and the flame burned as steadily, if not so fiercely, as at first.

When the intelligence of her marriage reached the unhappy husband, he was residing in a secluded village in Westphalia. The news struck him to the soul. In the tumult of his grief and passion he resolved to return to

England, obtain an interview with his ungrateful wife, and reproach her for her perfidy. He would not, indeed, disgrace her, but, having fulfilled his resolution, would seek out some obscure retreat, and there await, with what patience he might, the termination of his earthly sorrows. It was in pursuance of this determination that he entered Mr. Styles's establishment in the character of an usher, and under the assumed name of Black. Injured and embittered as he was, the brave little man, while carrying out his scheme, neglected no precaution that might shield his treacherous wife.

The difficulties he had to overcome in obtaining the desired interview were not a little augmented by the inopportune arrival at Hearts of a brother of Mrs. Brandreth's, long absent in the New World. This man, Richard Palgrave, was a person of violent and vindictive disposition, bold, unscrupulous, and, so far as mortal could decide, utterly devoid of any human sympathy whatsoever. His career had been one series of wild adventure, and generally unsuccessful enterprise. He had, nevertheless, contrived to accumulate some small capital, when, suddenly, his evil genius, in the form of the proprietor of a remarkably fine slave-schooner, induced him to invest it in a certain philanthropic venture, which resulted in the total and unconditional cession of both ship and cargo to the British government.

Utterly bankrupt in purse and character, Palgrave was anxiously ruminating as to his next movements,

when the tidings of his sister's marriage with the rich Sir Lewin Latymer revived all those fraternal feelings with which he had for fifteen years successfully struggled. He returned to England, and at once proceeded to quarter himself upon his astonished brother-in-law, who, up to the very moment of his appearance, had never even heard of his existence. Sir Lewin, though proud, was a generous and easy-tempered man; and his devotion to his beautiful wife would have ensured a friendly reception for the ex-filibuster and slave-captain, had he been a still rougher subject than he seemed. The latter had been some weeks at Hearts, and had already gained considerable influence over his host, when another visitor announced his approach, who threatened to alter the whole aspect of affairs.

Brandreth wrote to his wife, informing her that he had arrived in the vicinity, and declaring his fixed intention of seeing her again. It appeared that he left it to her to select time and opportunity, adding that he would walk twice a week through the woods in the direction of Hearts, as near as it could be approached without attracting observation.

The effect of this brief communication upon the unfortunate woman was to throw her into an agony of rage, remorse, and terror. She could not bring herself to believe that her wronged and deserted husband had come thither solely to see and bid her farewell. The idea that he was inspired with some deep scheme of

vengeance took possession of her mind. Her first step was to pen a wild, incoherent letter, entreating mercy and forbearance, and imploring him to leave her to the certain justice of her own conscience and of Heaven.

The sole rejoinder was : —

“ I am here to see you.”

Laura's mind was cast in one of nature's shallowest moulds. She was utterly unable to apprehend greatness of thought ; and the instances she had already experienced of her husband's magnanimity, left no other impression on her memory than as if they had been well-merited tributes to her own deservings.

More and more convinced that he intended to do her some personal injury—fearing to meet him, yet half frantic at the risk of exposure attending his continued presence in the neighbourhood—Mrs. Brandreth, in an evil hour, appealed for advice and assistance to her brother.

This worthy, who had conceived himself comfortably moored alongside what was likely to prove a very profitable prize, was perfectly aghast at the revelation he was doomed to hear. Pale with rage and disappointment, he strode up and down the room, gnawing his lip, and invoking curses upon the disturber of his golden dreams, his own confounded luck, and his sister's folly and rashness. But all this availed not. Something must be done, and done immediately. The pair set themselves seriously to consider what it should be.

Palgrave, attempting to gauge the husband's mind by his own, proposed the offer of a handsome bribe; and his sister weakly acceding, wrote from his dictation a second beseeching note, coupled however, this time, with the proposal to settle upon him an amount equal to the fortune he had formerly endowed her with.

"I am here to see you," was again the only rejoinder.

This plan having failed, Palgrave next suggested that Laura should meet her husband, as he required, engaging to remain concealed near at hand, prepared to interpose upon the first appearance of necessity. But this Laura absolutely refused. She was convinced he would murder her, and perhaps himself, before assistance could arrive; and the idea that, sooner or later, he would do so, obtained such complete possession of her mind as to affect her health, disturb her sleep, and render Mr. Palgrave to the last degree apprehensive lest she should divulge her secret before steps could be taken effectually to avert the threatened danger.

Now Palgrave, as I have hinted, was a man devoid of moral principle, and utterly unscrupulous as to the means and instruments by which he might work out any profitable end. He was, perhaps, not long in making up his mind to a course which, by involving his sister with him in the possession of a secret neither could dare betray, would bind her to him and his interests in a manner that could not fail to be of immense

advantage to the latter. In this calculation he did not overlook the probability that, within a short period, the death of Sir Lewin, old and infirm, and almost relationless, would leave Laura in possession of wealth, of which he had not even yet ascertained the limit.

I don't like dwelling on this sad story. The dark resolution once taken, Palgrave moved firmly, yet cautiously, onward to its completion. That he did not impart the scheme to his sister in direct terms, is likely enough. By simply promising her emancipation from her overwhelming fear, she became a passive instrument in his hands, and was used as occasion served.

He had brought with him from Mexico a grotesque-looking urchin, the offspring of a connexion with a half-bred Indian woman. This child he had at first deposited in a distant village, but had recently brought him to the immediate vicinity of Hearts, and concealed him in the cottage of a very ill-reputed pair—man and wife—who, together with a brother of the former, had attached themselves to him, as dependant and allies just as unscrupulous as himself.

With the assistance of these parties, Palgrave determined to capture the person of the unfortunate dwarf, and either retain him in some seclusion, or, if that were found impracticable, murder him outright. It was no difficult matter to lure him to any lonely spot. Laura had but to write and signify her assent to meet him; and this she accordingly did: but, first, in pursuance of

an idea that occurred to Palgrave's crafty mind, he induced his sister to require that he should sign certain conditions which would be submitted to him. To this proposal the unsuspecting dwarf—anxious only for the realisation of his daily and nightly desire—returned a blank sheet of paper, at the foot of which he had written:—

“ I approve of the above.

“ G. BLACK.”

To this, as you will remember, the anonymous letter, intended to check investigation, was afterwards prefixed.

It remained only to arrange time and place; and Laura wrote a few lines, appointing him to meet her the same day, in or near Searle's Close. The note—for some reason or other not very apparent—was confided to the care of the odd-looking boy, who was, for that occasion only, allowed to quit his concealment, and fulfilled his instructions very faithfully; his extraordinary speed and activity, derived from his half-Indian parentage, enabling him to escape pursuit as we have seen.

Conjecture alone can furnish the result. The half-holiday—inopportune as it proved for poor Brandreth—allowed of his accepting the rendezvous, and thither he no doubt at once proceeded. Not meeting the object of his search, he probably forced his way within the close, and was set upon by the three ruffians, who might have endeavoured, in the first instance, simply to secure

his person. Brandreth, however, was both strong and active. He must have eluded their grasp, and reached the centre of the close, when one of the party overtook and dealt him that blow which grazed his head and severed the ear. After this onslaught, nothing remained but to complete their bloody work; and how that was effected we already know.

Such was the fate of our poor little master. I am sorry to say that justice has failed to overtake his murderers. In the interval that had elapsed, the unhappy wife had become the inmate of a lunatic asylum; but, previously to this, her frantic expressions had so much alarmed the companions of her guilt, that they hastily abandoned the country and have not hitherto been traced. Sir Lewin Latymer himself had fallen into a state of weakness, both of mind and body, that rendered it unadvisable to communicate to him the miserable details I have related. He was removed to the neighbourhood of Bath; and with this dark story the horrors of Hearts conclude, for the place has been pulled down, and the plough has passed over Searle's Close.—

That's a melancholy story; and now I'm going to give you something to take the taste out. I have nearly got to the end of my school reminiscences, so don't be impatient, but just listen to this.

The last half I stopped at Old Styles's was the jolliest of any.

Styles was often ill. The head usher was called away suddenly to his mother, who was dying; and the second, Mopkins, was a muff. We did as we liked with him; and whenever there was a row, the senior fellows thought nothing of shying their Cæsars at his head!

What are Cæsars?

Books. Cæsar de Bello Gallico. Cæsar's crammers about pitching into the Gauls. Oh! what whoppers he used to write to the Senate! and how those Conscript parties sat and stroked their beards complacently, and sucked it all in! There was no Russell in those days to check Master Julius's arithmetic, and tell 'em at home that, instead of killing, at one go, a hundred and sixty thousand Allobroges or Allemanni, he had been all but smashed himself, and was only saved by his crack tenth legion, who charged like bricks and—— But that has nothing to do with Styles's.

One morning—quite at the beginning of the half—a new boy was brought into the schoolroom. A very gentlemanly boy he was; for he stepped inside the door, and made a low bow to the school generally, which was received with a loud laugh (Styles being ill in bed). His name was Bright—Harry Bright, eleven years old, with large dark-blue eyes, and long bright hair parted in the middle of the forehead, and turned under at the back, like a woman's, in a heavy glossy curl.

Every chap in the school had a nickname of some sort, and we furnished our young friend with his before

he sat down to his desk. We called him Madonna, from his beauty and the fashion of his hair. Altogether he looked so smart, good-humoured, and engaging, that everybody was pleased except Alf Bathurst, junior cock.

Alf saw that he should have to fight for his comb and dignity. Madonna and he were just about the same age and weight. Alf, we knew, was game enough, and took lots of punishing; and Madonna looked pluck itself. In short, the general impression was that it would prove one of the most gratifying mills in the annals of the school. Bets were covertly made (the amount of brandy-balls and rock-cakes staked on the event was something absurd), and, in a series of secret conferences during school-hours, it was arranged that the fight should come off at twelve o'clock. Two boys were subsequently chosen as seconds for each, and a deputation of juniors waited upon the illustrious senior cock (under colour of a difficult passage in the Georgics) humbly inviting his presence in the character of referee. The reply to this was all that could be desired.

Meanwhile, Madonna sat quietly at his desk—next to Alf's, blithely unconscious of the arrangements so anxiously making for his comfort and honour. Somehow, we forgot to tell him. It seemed so natural that they should fight!

Madonna seemed inclined to fraternise, and asked a whole lot of questions. What time we dined? If there

were puddings every day? Was it a decent playground? Was smoking allowed? &c. &c., to all of which Alf Bathurst replied with a stern politeness, as one who felt that, until the event of the morning had come off, the relative position they were ultimately to hold towards each other was not sufficiently defined for unrestrained social intercourse. Oddly enough, it never occurred, even to Alf, that his neighbour needed to be informed of the impending passage of arms.

Madonna was a little puzzled by Alf's dignified manner, and still more by some expressions which escaped him. Attached to every two desks was a small receptacle for the lexicons, &c. Perceiving that there was room here for some of his helps to learning, Madonna proceeded to fill up the vacant space, when Alf arrested his hand, quietly observing :

"Better wait till after the mill."

Madonna looked at him with astonishment, which was increased when Alf added in an easier tone :

"Do you mind my having a squint at your wrists?"

Totally unconscious of the cause of Alf's sudden interest in his anatomy, and wondering, farther, why he should prefer the oblique mode of observation referred to, Madonna, nevertheless, frankly extended his hands, which Alf examined with much interest, feeling and pinching the well-defined muscles, and the firm yet flexible joints.

"Tough work, I expect!" muttered Alf, thoughtfully, and let it fall.

Madonna opened his magnificent blue eyes to their full extent, and could by no means make it out; but the next moment classes were called, and no more opportunity was afforded for general conversation till the school rose.

At the first stroke of the clock the entire body, seniors and juniors, started up, and, with a wild shout, rushed to the playground, Madonna yielding readily to the common impulse, and rather curious to see what was to follow.

Arrived at the scene of expected action, his doubts were quickly resolved. Alf himself curtly informed him that, according to the custom of the school, it was necessary to decide, without an hour's delay, which was the better man, and entitled to the position of junior cock.

Madonna coloured to the eyes.

"I cannot fight," he said.

"You admit," said Bathurst, "that I can lick you, and may kick you also, if I please?"

This was a mere formula; but Madonna took it differently.

"You have no right to touch me," said Madonna; "but I can't fight—and I won't fight."

He turned away.

The eager crowd were, for a moment, stunned with surprise. Wonder and incredulity were stamped on every face. The boy who was marking out the ring stopped as though petrified. The senior cock himself

betrayed as much emotion as was consistent with his dignity. I must not dwell upon this scene. It was too true—Madonna declined to acknowledge Alf the better man, and yet refused to fight! There was but one inevitable conclusion—he was a coward!

At first it was hoped he was jesting; chaffing and remonstrance were tried—both were inefficacious: fight he would not. In this dilemma, Robert Lindsay stepped up to the still blushing Madonna, and taking him by the arm led him a few paces apart. The two conversed eagerly in an undertone, while we anxiously watched the conversation. At last, Lindsay was observed to give an almost convulsive start. He carried his hand to his forehead, gazed for a moment in his companion's face, burst into a wild laugh, and turned upon his heel.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Mr. Bright persists in declining the contest." (Bob Lindsay was always choice in his expressions.) "But the reason he assigns for it will hardly obtain credence in an assembly of British boys. He has given his word of honour to his mamma to be careful of his general beauty (of which, it would appear, that lady is justly proud); but especially of his fine eyes; and he is pledged never to expose those cherished organs to the chances of a fistic encounter."

Howls of derision followed this speech, mingled with shouts of genuine laughter; one chap throwing himself on the ground, tearing up the grass, and flinging it about him, in ecstasies of mirth.

"I have," resumed the senior cock, "pointed out to him the inevitable consequences. He is immovable. I leave the matter in your hands, and only regret that I should have been allured to the extremity of the playground on the pretence of a fight which was not to take place."

"Coward! Milksop! Send for his mamma! Where's Hannah with the pap-boat?" &c. yelled the incensed and disappointed crowd.

Poor Madonna turned from red to white, and looked as though he would have cried, but for a strange fire in his eyes that seemed to burn up the tears. It was a miserable sight. But how could we pity him? A fellow with a wrist like the fetlock of a thorough-bred, who almost admitted he could fight, and wouldn't! What was a black eye, or a mouse on the cheek, compared with the horrible scorn of boys?

Alf Bathurst had a spice of the bully. Thinking, moreover, to fall in with the popular view, he walked up to Madonna, and slapped him smartly on the face. Strange to say, the latter seemed scarcely to feel this additional insult. Some applause followed; but Robert Lindsay suddenly reappeared in our midst, and made another speech.

"Gentlemen," said Bob, "far be it from me to condemn your honest indignation, but let us not stoop to be bullies and persecutors. To my mind, a coward is an object of compassion, not of resentment. Nature dozed over his composition, and omitted the most common and

familiar ingredient of our mixed humanity. I have," added the kind-hearted cock, "no title to dictate lines of conduct to the junior division; but I will say this, whoever shows consideration to this unlucky stranger is the friend of Robert Lindsay."

Boys are queer animals. No one would believe it possible, that, after the scene of the morning, Madonna would become by bedtime one of the most popular fellows in the school! By Jove, he was! When he recovered his spirits a little, we began to find out (fighting aside) what a jolly chap he was—gay, generous—with altogether the sweetest temper I ever knew: he didn't know what malice was, and would have been on good terms, even with Bathurst. The latter, however, like a sneaking bully as he was, never from that day forth let slip an opportunity of annoying and insulting poor Madonna. He made him a sort of fag, often struck him, and more than once spat in his face. On these occasions, Madonna's eyes would light up with the same strange fire we noticed before; but he never struck again, and seemed to accept the necessity of submitting to every indignity, as the inevitable and only alternative of his not fighting.

I'm now going back to the day of Madonna's arrival.

His bed was in a large room, in which I, and a whole lot of other chaps—fourteen, I think—already slept. And after old Mopkins, the spoony usher, had

taken away the candle, we began to talk as usual. Madonna was rather silent.

"I say—you—new boy, what's your name?"

"Madonna!" said his next neighbour.

"A penny for your thoughts. I bet I know what they are."

"Tell me," said Madonna, who was sitting up in bed, swinging his nightcap, "are any of you fellows in love?"

A perfect volley of affirmatives replied. Love, you must know, was a sort of epidemic at Styles's—that is to say, it came in at intervals, with other games. There wasn't much usually in the summer half; but when cricket, and hockey, and trapball were stopped, love came regularly in. It happened to be highly fashionable at the time of Madonna's appearance, having recently received an immense impulse from the arrival at Miss Billiter's, Pallas House Academy, of three new pupils, all pretty.

Pallas House was so capitally close to us that, by great skill and strength, a cricket-ball might be propelled over an immense wall into their playground. It was a rum old house, with two little turrets at one end (that nearest us), one of which was called the Penitentiary, and used as a place of confinement for pupils in disgrace. We saw (at different times, of course) lots of little golden-haired captives bobbing about in this cage, sometimes playing with a smuggled doll, sometimes trying to relieve

the monotony of prison-life by killing flies, or other innocent pastime. We tried to establish a system of communication by signal, but it failed. One ingenious boy thought he had hit upon a method of conveying relief and sympathy in its sweetest form—sugar-candy. A small parcel was carefully made up, and attached to the tail of a kite, the wind being fair for the Penitentiary, and the prisoner on the alert; the kite was dropped gradually down the wind till it reached the necessary point, then suddenly loosed, in the expectation that the tail would drop past the prison window. It did so with the greatest accuracy; but the small prisoner's arm was too short to catch it: the packet descended lower than was intended, and flop it went, right through the window of Miss Billiter's study! Kites were stopped for the rest of the half.

To go back to our bedroom chat. A sigh from Madonna was the next sound audible.

"Tell us all about it, old chap," said a voice from an adjacent couch, in a mock sympathetic tone.

"If you won't make fun of it," replied Madonna. "It's no laughing matter, I can tell you. I've seen a good deal of the sort of thing. I've had much sorrow."

"Have you, though? I shouldn't have thought it, to look at you," squeaked Poppy Purcell, across seven other chaps. "What's she like?"

"I've been in love," said Madonna, "ever since—I

don't remember when I wasn't—nine times, I think, with all sorts of women; but bosh! It's all hollow, sir—hollow! They go to school and forget a fellow, or ——”

“A fellow—them!” put in Matilda Lyon (whose name was Matthew). “I fear, Madonna, those precious eyes of yours have much to answer for.”

“I'm as constant a chap now as ever lived,” rejoined Madonna, warmly, “whatever I have been in my younger days. The world soon smudges off one's romance! Besides, I'm tired of change. I'll tell you a secret. I'm in love, and mean to be, for ever and a day, with the sweetest little creature breathing.”

“Oh, of course!” “What's her name?” How old?” “Dark or fair?” “Ringlets?” demanded several beds, the room becoming much interested.

“Eleanor Wilton,” said Madonna, in a low voice; “she's an orphan, a kind of fifth cousin of mine, sixteen times removed. She came over from India last year after the death of her mother, to be educated, and she lives with a Mr. and Mrs. Perfect (perfect brutes, I call them), the husband a snobbish agent of her deceased papa. She's nearly ten. She fell desperately in love with your humble servant. I'd nothing in hand at the moment, having just had a split with Anne Chilcote about dancing twice with a fellow in tunica. And we're engaged.”

“Engaged!”

"Regularly booked, sir. Why not? I've had my swing. I've done. I can never love again, after Eleanor. And she is a darling, I promise you!"

We further gathered from the heart-worn Madonna that his present lady-love was in appearance precisely his opposite, having large night-black eyes and raven hair, colourless cheeks, dark shades under the eyes, sad, dreamy expression, &c. &c. In short, the lover drew a very interesting and poetic picture of his lady; and concluded by assuring us that her attachment to himself, however, unmerited, approached to adoration.

As for the engagement, he certainly showed us next day a paper written by his beloved, which the constant youth wore (in a small velvet case like a needle-book) next his heart.

It was to the following effect, written upon pencil lines, only half rubbed out, and was evidently one of her very earliest efforts at penmanship:—

"This is to give notis that I have promessed to be your true-love and when I groe up I will mary you if you like and to be your Dutiful wife till death and if not I would rather go to my mother—

"You believe me,

"Dear sir,

"Yours truly,

"ELEANOR WILTON."

We thought the conclusion rather stiff, considering

the frankness of the foregoing portion; but Madonna explained that it was to be regarded rather in the light of a formal instrument than as a warm expression of feeling.

Certainly if seed-cakes, mince and other pies, and macaroons, speak the language of love, Madonna's account of his lady's devotion was fully corroborated. Every week parcels were arriving, containing such articles as the aforesaid, and covered with the strictest and most earnest invocations to the railway authorities concerning their safe and punctual delivery. How the little lady provided these testimonials was a mystery to Madonna—assuredly, it was not through her guardians; and the most plausible theory was, that she had won over the housekeeper—as well she might, the little darling!—to forward these proofs of attachment to her chosen lord.

But a change was destined to come over Madonna.

One fatal half-holiday it so happened that, in returning home from playing cricket on the neighbouring downs, we met the establishment of Pallas House in full procession. The usual file-fire of glances was exchanged as the two trains swept past each other on opposite sides of the road, but only one casualty occurred; and who should that be, but the love-wasted, used-up Madonna.

Tripping at the governess's side was a new pupil, the most exquisite little fairy you can conceive. Don't think

I am romancing, when I declare to you, that in all my life—and I've seen something, knocking about the world—two more beautiful human creatures than Madonna Bright and Augusta Grosvenor (for that we soon learned was the new girl's name) I never beheld. She had a perfect cataract of rich, brown, silky hair, eyes that glittered like stars, and she walked with the air of a little princess.

"Poppy," faltered Madonna, who was walking with Purcell, catching his companion's arm, "I've seen my fate."

"Hold up, my pippin!" replied the more philosophic Poppy. "Have a brandy-ball?"

Madonna answered (in substance) that no amount of lollipops could minister effectually to a mind diseased; that it was, in fact, all over with him; that he never loved before; and, finally, that he could be content to perish in the course of that afternoon, if his doing so might afford even a momentary gratification to the object of his unquenchable passion.

On being reminded of his engagement to Eleanor Wilton, Madonna replied, with some warmth, that he was tired of her childish homage, and should take an early opportunity of pointing out to that young lady some more eligible investment for her affections; and finding, on arriving at home, a plum-cake of unusual dimensions, he divided it among us, with a sort of disdainful pity, not reserving a crumb for himself.

Perhaps, if he had known it would be the last love-offering, save one, he was ever to receive from that source, he might have been less generous.

I won't bother you with all the extravagancies committed by poor Madonna while suffering from this severe attack. Positively, the boy scarcely ate or slept. He seemed to live upon the thought of this little fairy, and nothing else. As it happened, he saw her several times in a week. A series of lectures upon scientific subjects were being delivered at the public rooms, and these were attended by detachments from both the schools, in which the lovers were included.

I say lovers, because, either attracted by his uncommon beauty or his speaking gaze, or influenced by some odd instinct or other, the little lady seemed fully to comprehend the state of our friend's mind, and to accept his worship with considerable satisfaction. She had a thousand funny little coquetish airs and graces, all directed at Madonna, yet all tempered with a most becoming haughtiness, which plunged him deeper than ever in love. I should think Madonna must have derived a good deal of information from those lectures.

I never saw his attention awakened but to one experiment, and that was when the whole room took hands, and the same electric shock that paralysed Madonna's elbow elicited a scream from Augusta Grosvenor.

A strange thing was now about to occur.

I think it was about three weeks after our first meet-

ing with Augusta, that the school one day went out to walk. At the first turn in the road we came pounce upon the establishment of Pallas House. The schools met. As they did so, I felt my arm squeezed hard by Madonna, with whom I walked, and heard him draw in his breath as one in terrified surprise. At that instant Augusta Grosvenor passed. By her side there walked a little girl, with jet-black hair, small pale face, and the largest eyes I ever saw. Those eyes she fixed upon Madonna with an expression that haunted me—I don't know why—for days and days. It's foolish to say days; for, to this very moment, I can recall it, and I see it now. I knew, without ever having seen her, that this was Madonna's little true-love, Eleanor Wilton.

We walked on in silence, Madonna amazed and bewildered as though he had seen a little spirit. In truth, she had passed us almost like one. I don't remember that we ever talked upon the subject. I did not know how Madonna might receive it; and, as I saw he was really very unhappy, I thought it best to say nothing. He moped about the school and playground, a totally changed being, and so provoked Alf Bathurst by his apathy, or, as Alf called it, sulkiness, that the latter tyrannised over and worried him in every possible manner. It was pitiable and disgusting to see. Oh, if I had but been two years older! I would No matter.

One day Alf struck Madonna a severe blow in the face. The flush that followed it did not subside, as was

natural. Headache and sickness followed; and the doctor, being sent for, directed that Madonna should be kept apart from the boys, and, if possible, despatched home. This, with proper precautions, was done, and we shortly after learned that our schoolfellow was lying at home, attacked with small-pox.

During his absence we saw but little of our fair neighbours, and only heard incidentally that the little new girl, Eleanor Wilton, was in rather delicate health, and rarely went out with the rest of the school. The poor little soul, however, seemed to be no especial favourite of the savage old governess, for we twice saw her in the Penitentiary!

At the end of two months Madonna returned to school, perfect in health; but oh, my gracious, what a change! His beauty—every bit of it, except his eyes—was gone; his forehead seamed, his cheeks hollow, his hair cut short. Poor old chap!

We all pitied him, and gave him a jolly welcome, pretending not to see any alteration. All but that bully, Alf Bathurst. The ill-natured brute laughed, and made fun of him, asking what mamma said now to our pretty face? Who was to be his next love? &c.

“Look sharp, you beggar,” he added, “and bring me that ball” (flinging it to the other end of the playground). “I’ll see if you have forgotten the use of your stumps, anyhow.”

“Stop,” said Madonna, very pale. “I can’t run

much yet; but, if you like, I'll show you instead a capital new game."

"Cut away, milksop! Is it one of nurse's teaching? What a lot of asses' milk it will take to make a man of you!" said Alf.

"Come here," said Madonna, addressing the fellows generally. He walked into the middle of the ground, Alf following. A circle of boys collected round them. Madonna turned up the cuff of his jacket, like a conjuror.

"You see this?" he asked, showing Alf his open palm.

"I do, you donkey!"

"Feel it, too!" replied Madonna, and dealt him a smack on the face you might have heard at the end of the playground.

Bathurst staggered from the blow, and the surprise; but, recovering himself, flew at Madonna like a tiger. Several of us, however, threw ourselves between them. A fight wasn't to be wasted in that slovenly and irregular manner; and it was clear that Madonna's blood was up at last.

"You coward!" screamed Alf, over the heads of the crowd, "will you fight?"

"With the greatest pleasure," replied Madonna, politely, cool as a cucumber. "My mother, sir, is very much of your opinion as to the value of my beauty; and having now withdrawn her prohibition, my fine eyes are

at the service of your fists, provided you can reach them. Yes, you coward, tyrant, sneak, and bully!" cried the boy, growing warmer, as he proceeded, with the recollection of what he had endured, "I have a long account to settle with you; and I'll make your punishment remembered in the school as long as Styles's stands!"

Tremendous cheering greeted this warlike speech.

The fight was arranged to come off after the school rose at five. Preliminaries were duly settled, seconds chosen (Ophelia and a boy called the Tipton Slasher, from some supposed resemblance to that distinguished gentleman, for Alf; and Poppy Purcell and Matilda Lyon for Madonna); the senior cock, in the handsomest manner, volunteering his services as referee: and this time the mill came fairly off.

I suppose that a happier five-and-forty minutes never fell to the lot of boys than those we now enjoyed. There we sat in a wide circle, hugging our knees, sucking brandy-balls, cheering, criticising, at the very climax of human happiness.

The end, satisfactory as it was, came but too quickly. Never was boy more beautifully and scientifically whopped, than Alf Bathurst. He wore a pulpier look ever after that polishing he got at the hands of the despised Madonna.

It is believed in the school to this hour, that Styles himself witnessed the fight. All I know is, that the curtain of his window was ostentatiously drawn, in a

manner to show that he wasn't there, of course; and also, that a mysterious order reached the kitchen, directing, without any assignable reason, that tea, which was always served at six, should be delayed twenty minutes.

If our suspicions were correct, Styles calculated the time it would take to lick Alf Bathurst to a nicety; for, at ten minutes past six, the "Tipton" announced that Alf gave in. Amidst tumultuous applause Madonna was declared victor, and advanced to the proud position of JUNIOR COCK!

Bob Lindsay pressed his hand with tears in his eyes, and led him towards the house.

It was a beautiful sight to see the two cocks walk away, arm in arm; the senior, the boy of fifty battles, kindly and patiently commenting upon the noticeable points of the contest; and, further, explaining to his young brother the means he had found most efficacious in removing the traces of such encounters. Scarcely less beautiful was it to notice the manner in which the senior cock affected to ignore the fact, that any portion of the cheers that pursued them up the playground was due to his own manly condescension.

But, although victorious in the field, our poor Madonna had other and more painful battles to fight. He had come back apparently as much in love as ever with his little coquettish princess, and, I have no doubt, counted the minutes till his first chance of seeing her. This soon occurred.

Madonna had leave one day down the town. He came back the image of anguish and despair. He had met the Pallas House school—and Augusta, looking radiantly beautiful, had turned quickly from him, with a look of such unmistakable horror, surprise, and disgust, that he could no longer doubt the effect upon her heart of his altered visage. Eleanor Wilton was not with them.

Only one chance of reviving her interest in him suggested itself to poor Madonna—it wasn't of much use—and one or two fellows of experience whom he consulted begged him not to risk it.

He had brought back with him to school a present from his grandmother, a beautiful ruby heart set round with small rich brilliants. This Madonna resolved to offer at his mistress's shrine. In spite of all advice he did so. It went by post, unaccompanied by any communication, excepting only his initials, "H. B."

We heard no more of that. As for Augusta, although he met her a score of times, she never again turned even a passing look upon her unhappy lover. It seemed as though she had come to a secret resolution not to do so.

But one remembrance did arrive for poor Madonna. It came in a queer way. We were marching one day in single file round the playground, under the superintendence of Sergeant Grace, of the 7th Hussars; a rough chap he was, and stood no nonsense. As Madonna mournfully strutted by:

"Number nineteen—fall out!" growled the sergeant.

Madonna accordingly tumbled out, and stood at attention; a worrying position for a heart-broken lover!

The sergeant fumbled in his pocket. Madonna's heart stood suddenly still, for it flashed upon his memory that Sergeant Grace was an attendant likewise at Pallas House, to teach what the sergeant himself described as "polite walking."

"Look'e, now," said Grace, "I believe I'm a blessed old spoon, for running this yere risk—but, darn it all! I couldn't help it—she's such a dear little thing—and I don't think she——she will—March!" concluded the sergeant in a voice of thunder, thrusting into Madonna's hand a small packet.

That drill seemed interminable to the anxious lover. At last "dismiss!" was given, and he darted into the school, and tore open the missive.

It was a little box of choice bonbons, and under the lid was written:—

"DEAR, DEAR BOY,

"I am glad you are well—I'm not.

"E. W."

"Good little heart!" thought Madonna, with a pang at his own, over and above the disappointment, and quite different from it. "*She* does not turn from me, at least."

An interval of a fortnight or so now passed.

And I wish that you didn't want to hear any more! I always feel choky somehow, when I talk or think of the marvellous thing that followed. Perhaps you won't believe it; but it's as true as that I'm now sitting here.

About three o'clock in the morning, on the 2d of June, a loud cry that sounded like "Help!" roused us all from our sleep. We started up in bed. The shutters were not closed, and the room was already grey with the coming dawn. The cry had proceeded from Madonna, who was sitting up, like the rest, but motionless, his hands clasped upon his forehead. We asked him if he was ill, and why he had cried out. He made no answer, but took away his hands from his face, and looked so pale and strange, that Purcell was moving away to call the usher.

Madonna caught his dress.

"No, no, Poppy; I'm not ill. All right," he said, forcing a smile; "I was dreaming—only dreaming—go to bed, old boy. You don't think they heard me, do you?"

In a minute or so he seemed, as he said, all right, and we tumbled into our nests again to finish the night.

The next day Madonna's bed was vacant. His jacket and trousers were missing, his shoes and stockings remained. The window sash was open. He had made his exit that way, and, no doubt, by means of a familiar leaden water-pipe, which had often assisted us to terra firma.

The rest of the story I shall tell, partly from his own account, partly from what we learned elsewhere.

He said that, on the night in question, he had felt very odd and uneasy for several hours after retiring to bed, and could not close his eyes for a moment. A curious sense of lassitude and hunger possessed him; he would have given five shillings for a hard biscuit. We remembered his asking if any chap happened to have any eatables under his pillow—but nobody had. At last, towards morning, he dozed off, and had a dream.

He thought that his little true love, Eleanor Wilton, came and stood at his bedside. She was dressed in white, and carried a basket filled with curious and beautiful white flowers, just budding. Although she did not speak, the idea seemed to be conveyed to him that she had brought them as her last—her parting present, and that he must take them.

Madonna strove to obey the intimation, but found he could not stir. Paralysed, somehow, he could neither move nor utter a sound. This quiescence seemed to grieve his little lady. She gazed at him for a moment with sad, reproachful eyes, then faded into nothing. Madonna awoke.

Presently he slept again. A second time came the little ghostly visitant, with her basket of flowers now fully blown. In the centre of each was a ruby heart encircled with diamonds. Eleanor looked very wan and

pale, but she smiled as she offered the flowers, and though, as before, he was powerless to reply, he understood that she was to come once again, and if he did not then answer, he would never — never — never — Before the meaning was complete, she was gone, and once more he awoke, and once more he slept again.

For the third time the fairy figure stood at his side; but now so attenuated and indistinct, that he could only faintly trace her outline; and the flowers in her basket were broken, drooping, and dead. He thought she stooped over him as though bestowing a shadowy kiss, then began to disappear.

Madonna struggled fiercely to move, in vain, and uttered the cry that awoke us all.

He was now perfectly convinced that Eleanor was ill — was dying — perhaps dead. He would not mention his fears, but hastily resolved upon his course of action.

No sooner had we settled off to sleep again — which must have been in some five minutes — than he got up, threw on some clothes, softly opened the window, and slid down safely into the garden. It was early twilight — not a soul astir. Scaling the garden wall, he hurried round outside that of the playground till he arrived in front of Pallas House. Something drew his attention to the window of the Penitentiary — doubtless because it was the only one that had neither curtain nor shutter. Nothing indeed was visible; but Madonna felt as certain she was there, as though she had beckoned him with her

hand from the window. Yet, how to reach the room? Suddenly he remembered the gardener's fruit-ladder, which lay in an empty cow-shed. Back he flew—found the ladder—dragged, pitched, and slung it across the wall, and, in three minutes, had reached the window. He could make out nothing in the darkness within, so tried the sash—it was not secured. He pushed it up softly, and looked in. A chair, a small table with a book and a mug of water, a low couch, and upon it, sitting up, as though in expectation—Eleanor!

She exhibited not the least surprise.

"I knew you would come, dear boy," said the little thing, faintly; "but you were very long. I want to speak to you."

Madonna was in the room in an instant. In a few words, uttered with difficulty, she told him that the arrival of the ruby heart had been notified to Miss Billiter, who taxed Augusta with receiving it. That young lady having, it would appear, a desire to retain the ornament, though she discarded the donor, at first denied its possession; but, after two hours' confinement in the Penitentiary, resolved to endure no more for the sake of either lover or offering, and gave in. She asserted, however, that it was not intended for her, but for Eleanor Wilton, with whose affection for Madonna she was well acquainted, and who, she knew, would unhesitatingly take all responsibility. Miss Billiter at once turned all her fury upon the latter; and, on her

refusing to reveal the name of the sender, committed her to the usual prison, directing that she should have nothing but water—not even a crust of bread—until she had discarded her sullens, and accepted her mistress's terms.

Poor Eleanor, however, had been for some time very ailing, and the confinement and privation, not to mention the excitement of her mind, told more heavily upon her delicate frame than might have been apprehended. Still, nothing could justify the keeping of the poor innocent nineteen hours without notice, solace, or refreshment of any kind.

As she came to this climax of her story, Madonna's rage mastered his grief. He started to his feet, intending to seek assistance; but Eleanor exerted all her strength, and held him fast.

"It is no use, Harry," she said, "I'm going to my mother; you know, I said I would rather. Don't leave me again—oh, don't—don't! Oh, I am so glad you came! I asked God if you might, because you were my only friend. Let me lean my head on your shoulder," said the little thing. "Wait!" she added, and gently parting the long hair from Madonna's scarred forehead—white and smooth as ever to her loving eyes—she gave it one long kiss, then sunk lower, and hung upon his bosom as he knelt.

He thought she was sinking to sleep, and, almost afraid to breathe, remained perfectly motionless for

nearly half an hour. Then a feeling of anxiety and dread stole over him. He looked closely at her. One tiny finger had hooked in his button-hole. He would not move it; but tenderly lifted back the small head. The heavy black curls fell back. One glance was sufficient. He thought, poor boy! he had been soothing her to rest, and a better Comforter had, meanwhile, laid his little true-love in her mother's bosom!

Bewildered and stupefied with grief, poor Madonna remained, for some time, kneeling beside the corpse; then, recollecting himself, placed it fitly on the low couch, kissed the yet warm lips, and went down stairs.

He met an early housemaid, who started and screamed as though he had been a ghost, which, it is probable, he much resembled. To her he said that a child—his cousin—was lying dead above, and that he was hastening to tell his friends and hers.

The servant tried to detain him; but he walked down-stairs, opened the front door, and proceeded straight to the school, and to Styles's room. There he related the circumstance of his dream, and the sad story of his little lady's imprisonment and death.

Styles—when he wasn't in school—was a kind, good old chap, just and decided, and always did the right thing—which is a great point, you know.

He wrote instantly to his friend, the clergyman of the parish, who was also a magistrate. This gentleman

came to him directly, and—I don't know exactly what was the result of their consultation—but a rather rapid correspondence ensued with the governess at Pallas House.

It was reported that a coroner's inquest would be held on the poor child. This, indeed, was not done; but you'll be glad to hear—at least, I was—that that act of tyranny cost Miss Billiter her school, and that she now goes out teaching at eighteen pence an hour.

Madonna never recovered his former spirits. He left at the end of the half, and his friends sent him abroad with a tutor; but he became so fretful, irritable, and impatient of control—at least, of that sort of control—that his father yielded to a curious fancy that had seized him in Paris, and procured his enrolment in the French marine. This was just at the beginning of the war.

Madonna was appointed to the *Ville de Paris*, and sailed to the East, carrying the flag of Admiral Hamelin. At the attack by the ships upon the sea-forts, at the first bombardment of Sebastopol, the *Ville de Paris* got into a hot position. She lost several officers and many men, and a fragment of the same shell which killed two aides-de-camp of the admiral laid poor Madonna lifeless on the deck.

The French officers kindly collected every little article of value belonging to him, and cutting off a mass of his bright curls, transmitted the whole to his relations. Among other things was a small velvet case which was

found in his bosom, and within it a little paper written in a child's hand. You've heard it:—

“This is to give notis that I have promessed to be your true-love and when I groe up I will marry you if you like and to be your Dutiful wife till death and if not I would rather go to my mother—

“You believe me,

“Dear sir,

“Yours truly,

“ELEANOR WILTON.”

The end of my last half at Old Styles's drew near. I did not know at the time, for certain, that it *would* be the last, or I might have been even sorrier than I was.

As it happened, so many of the fellows I liked best were about to leave, that I felt quite melancholy and out of heart. So much so, that in the great bolstering-match in which, on the night before breaking up, we, the seniors, stood the whole junior dormitory (with Matilda Lyon and the Slasher given), I declare I could not fight at all. Psha, sir! an infant would have done more! As for pitching into the chaps who were going, it was simply impossible. I couldn't do it, sir. My better feelings revolted even against the make-believe strife; and at the very moment Matilda cut me off my pins with what I must acknowledge to be the most beautiful back stroke I ever remember to have seen, at that very

moment, I give you my honour, the tears were in my eyes for thinking of his (Matilda's) approaching departure.

We seniors were just as nearly beaten in that match as possible. It was touch and go. It shows how much the mind's unconscious influence may restrict the body's action. Our defeat—had we had the misfortune to sustain one—would have been entirely owing to the melancholy abstraction with which, from different causes, Madonna, Purcell, and I, performed our respective duty.

Mine was of some importance. I commanded a light pillow-party, detached by Lindsay to amuse the enemy, and decoy them, if possible, into an ambuscade he was meanwhile preparing in the gallery. This operation required some little tact and delicacy, our opponents being perfectly wide-awake, and quite sensible, from the weakness of my force, that some little arrangement for their sudden benefit must be in the back-ground. They consequently retained their defensive position, nor could all the taunts and menaces of my following (*I* could not join in the chaff for my life) tempt them one step beyond it. At length an order from Bob Lindsay, who was growing impatient of inaction, directed us to advance slap into their room. Supports and a reserve would follow. Of course we obeyed. This was too much. A rush from all sides was made on our devoted little band. I just caught sight of Madonna, fighting in the thickest of the throng like an animated statue in

a nightgown, not a muscle of his face expressing the slightest interest in the matter, and was then, as I have related, swept off my legs by the unerring bolster of Matilda Lyon.

The battle raged for a minute around, or rather *upon*, my body, for lots of chaps appeared to find it a convenient vantage post, when a strong hand grasped my foot, and pulled me into the passage. The enemy followed up, determined, as it seemed, to capture me alive or dead. I was let go. Several of my gallant fellows fell beside me,—one of them very unnecessarily poking his head into my stomach, and nearly knocking out all my remaining breath—when:—

“Lindsay! Lindsay to the rescue!” greeted my ear.

A sound as of low, very low, thunder shakes the passage. It is the seniors advancing in force, Lindsay himself and Ophelia at their head. Already their night-caps glimmer fitfully in the uncertain light . . . Matilda Lyon and the accomplished Slasher bestir themselves to rally and reform their excited band. A dreadful pause.

“Gentlemen,” says Bob Lindsay, in his clear ringing voice, well known in bolster-battle, “Gentlemen of the junior dormitory, strike first!”

A pillow at Bob’s head was the uncourteous reply.

“*Char-rr-rg-e!*”—

After the action, in which Bob surpassed himself in conduct and daring, (the gallant senior cock was

willing to leave behind an example of prowess that might be handed down to successive generations of boys), our victorious leader conducted his panting troops back to their dormitory, and assembled us round his bed. He desired to address a few words of affectionate counsel, of warning, and farewell, to those who had so long shared his triumphs and his toils.

I was in a mood to be a good deal touched with the scene. In truth, it was not devoid of melancholy attributes. Bob half reclined upon his curtainless couch, in an attitude of easy power. The light of battle had faded from his brow. He leaned his cheek upon his hand, and even at this climax of his glory, seemed impressed with the unsatisfying nature of all that is most coveted in temporal fame and power. Similar misgivings, or rather, let us say, whisperings of truth, have visited other minds than Bob's, in the like heyday of prosperity and success.

No one chose to interrupt his meditation. At length, with a powerful effort, the senior cock shook off the growing dejection, and addressing the expectant circle in a few brief but well-chosen phrases, congratulated them upon the victory which had so worthily wound up the triumphs of the half.

It was true, he remarked, that the recent advantage had been obtained over our own people—boys trained in our own dormitories—chaps shouting the same war-cry, and up to the very identical dodges with

which *we* were familiar. They would, however, remember that the odds, in point of numbers, were considerable; and if the Latin motto, "*Fortissimus qui se*,"* be correct, we deserved only the more credit for having so thoroughly thrashed *ourselves*! In reference to *cricket* he had one caution, and but one, to give. It should be wrought upon their banners—it should be thundered in the playing-fields until the distant cow-house reverberated the sound—nay, it should be engraven on the heart—(Bob's voice sunk nearly to a whisper)—the heart of every boy who had, at that organ, the reputation of the school:—"Oil your bats."

The speaker, labouring under some emotion, proceeded to remark, that he had observed, with much concern, the gradual growth of an upas-tree, respecting which he knew not whether his feelings of contempt, of terror, or of detestation, really predominated. He alluded to—to the introduction of *hopscotch*!

From being confined to a few small boys, and the day-scholars, it had risen—had prevailed—had swept away, in its resistless track, the whole junior division, and had slightly invaded the senior! He denounced it in the strongest terms his self-respect permitted him to employ! It was a sport invented by, and expressly adapted to, the capacities of the lowest grade of society. Its birthplace was a city pavement;

* Bravest, who conquers himself.

its atmosphere the courts and alleys of St. Giles's and Bethnal Green. He foresaw, in the increasing favour with which it was regarded, the germs of a total revolution in the play system of that school, the utter downfall and destruction of those noble traditions of which football and cricket constituted the glorious base, and "widdy-widdy-waycock-warning" the light and sparkling crown!—Let his hearers reflect on this. There was—there *could* be—no middle path. *Delenda est Hopscotia!* It must FALL!

He had arrived at the last topic on which he would venture to touch. In resigning into the hands of the school the dignity they had conferred, in laying down the Senior Cockship, and retiring into the privacy of—of public life—(Bob was destined to a diplomatic career),—he earnestly trusted that the office to which he had alluded had suffered no derogation in his person; but that his successor, be it a Slasher, an Ophelia, a Lally Lute, or an Ambo Hall, would receive it, untarnished, from the hand—*first* he would call it—that had won and supported it, in the cause and for the honour of the school!

The honourable cock then shook hands with everybody present, and intimating his desire that they should retire to bed for the remainder of the night, (about twenty minutes), was presently left alone, except that one or two of his most attached friends—myself among them—still lingered round our leader's couch, unwilling

to believe that we should listen to his eloquence no more. It was then that Lindsay, Purcell, Ophelia, and I, entered into a solemn compact, that—on that day twenty years—we four, or such of us as might still be living, should meet in a place agreed upon, and compare notes as to our experience of that world on whose untrodden paths we were now about to enter.

The next morning saw us departing for our different destinations. We took a cordial, unaffectedly regretful, leave of our master. Kind, good Old Styles! If it were any consolation to his oppressed mind to know, that, without relaxing in the duty of a master, he had attached us to him by the ties of an almost filial affection—that comfort he certainly possessed. The secret of this regard lay in the *confidence* we had in him. He was a just man. Keeping his own passions under the strictest control, and observing the most rigid faith in all engagements, declared or implied, he never suffered an act of unfairness or oppression to pass without reprehension or punishment; and, while he made all due allowance for want of capacity, treated wilful negligence and inattention to duty as breaches of a contract which he himself had scrupulously fulfilled. Old Styles had a remarkable, almost intuitive, perception of character—a rare and useful gift. He positively seemed to read off our minds as though they were so many pages in the Delectus; and often astonished us beyond measure with his perfect appreciation of the character and disposition of chaps whom *we*, indeed, knew well enough,

but he only by meeting them in class, on rare and chance occasions in the playground, or in one of those country walks in which he sometimes, though seldom, accompanied us. Perhaps you'll say I've had too little experience to judge; but I do think, somehow, if those who have charge of youth would condescend to pay more attention to the diversities of character, schools would be happier, and boys better.

I got home without even the ghost of an adventure, and was received by my stepmother and Augustus with that ultra-civility which never failed to awaken my suspicion. My first questions related to my father.

He was, they told me, precisely in the same helpless condition in which I had last seen him, and from which there was little or no chance of his recovering. Nay, the real truth was—for I was now nearly a man, and could bear it—he had sunk into confirmed and hopeless idiocy.

My heart swelled—for I had always entertained a secret hope that, by the blessing of God, through the instrumentality of that careful and judicious treatment his ample means could command, my poor father's intellect would ultimately regain its balance. I had heard that such prostrations, when caused by over-study, and that alone, were seldom permanent, and almost invariably yielded to skilful and vigilant treatment. And, in spite of what I now heard, I was not inclined to abandon that hope.

I inquired where my father was now residing.

Still at Digglesworth, (a place I never, as I have mentioned, could discover in any map). It was quiet and bracing, and very picturesque.

Mrs. Balfour had used this last expression before; and even then it struck me as singular that beauty of scenery should be such a recommendation to one whose mind took cognizance of no outward object. In my present mood of mistrust it seemed stranger than ever, and I resolved to press my investigations.

Where was Digglesworth?

It was near—near Southampton, as I had been already informed. Why did I ask? Was I a competent judge of the salubrity of the spot? I could not surely desire to *see* my suffering parent. Such an interview would be most inadvisable for both.

My heart told me that I *did* desire to see my father, and my tongue did not scruple to say so. His condition, I urged, could scarcely be worse than it was when my society was his only solace. Upon *me*, and my childish efforts for his amusement, were shed the last feeble glimmerings of his exhausted intellect; and I was as certain as of my own existence that no evil, but rather good, would accrue to either of us by an interview. And, once more, I pressed my inquiry relative to the position of Digglesworth, and the guardianship to which my father had been entrusted.

Mrs. Balfour was evidently disgusted at my sudden taste for topography; and on her declaring, with some

impatience, that she would supply me with no information upon a subject on which it appeared too evident we should never agree, I thought it better for the moment not to press the matter.

As in former vacations, Mrs. Balfour was all kindness and suavity, and did all she could, without inconvenience to herself or Augustus, to render my stay agreeable. But this did not satisfy me. I was haunted day and night with that vague sense of "something wrong," which is often more difficult to bear than a more defined and assured suspicion. I knew not whom to consult, in whom to confide. One thing only I was resolved upon—to *find my father*.

One morning Mrs. Balfour suddenly informed me that she considered me too old and too advanced in knowledge to associate any longer exclusively with boys. (I bowed to the unusual compliment.) I should not, therefore, return to school; but it would be desirable, she added, that, before I made choice of a profession, I should see a little more of the world.

In no decision of hers had I ever acquiesced so heartily as in this. I expressed my impatience to commence the examination she proposed as soon as possible.

My stepmother commended my enthusiasm, and then inquired if I had perused many standard works of travel.

I enumerated several. Robinson Crusoe—Tramper's Travels—the adventures of those intrepid men, Sinbad,

of the naval service—and Peter Wilkins, civilian; and was proceeding with my list, when Mrs. Balfour cut it short by placing before me a large volume enriched with magnificent views of tropical scenery, as well as engravings of remarkable plants, animals, insects, &c., and recommended me henceforth to busy myself with the real romance of Nature; leaving the gentlemen I had mentioned to fulfil their duty of stimulating juvenile curiosity generally, while *I* passed on to the more legitimate gratification of mine.

As this was the most sensible remark she had ever spent on me, I received it with befitting grace, and turned with zeal to the study of the work she had placed before me. It was, indeed, replete with interest, and almost enticed my mind away from the subject that pressed achingly upon it.

From that day I remember that the conversation at meals, &c. perpetually turned on travelling, especially in distant regions—those glowing lands on which my book dilated with such fervent eloquence.

“Should you not, boys”—asked my stepmother, one evening—“should you not delight to visit this paradise—this beautiful, mysterious garden of the world—this wondrous South Africa?”

“Oh, mamma, mamma!” cried Augustus, clasping his fat hands, “if it were not for leaving *you* ——”

And he flung himself theatrically on her neck. It was a trifle overacted, and I involuntarily smiled.

"*You say nothing, Philip,*" said Mrs. Balfour.

"*Indeed, ma'am,*" said I, "*I think with Augustus. I should like very much to go.*"

"*You talk coldly enough about it, however. Are you serious?*"

"*Quite.*"

"*Suppose,*" said Mrs. Balfour, "*I had an opportunity of sending you into the very heart of those wonders of which you have been reading! There!*"

"*Can you do so, indeed, ma'am?*" I asked, surprised out of my apathy, and really delighted.

"*My cousin, Captain M'Creechy, has been charged with a commission to the tribes on the Kikkiwacki river, South Africa. As his business is of a mixed commercial and zoological character—being, in fact, the introduction of flat-irons among the Kikkiwakkis, in exchange for specimens of the blue-nosed baboon—he will have opportunities such as no travellers in those precincts have heretofore enjoyed. Captain M'Creechy would, I feel certain, willingly take charge of one of my boys. Now, Augustus—silly boy—is so liable to chilblains, that——*"

"*Oh, ma'am, would he take me?*" I exclaimed.

"*I think he might be prevailed on to do so. I know that he likes a young, intelligent companion. He sails in about ten days.*"

I thanked her warmly for her kindness, and already felt myself a second Bruce.

In ten days, though! Then I must be stirring; for think not, dear stepmamma, that my topography is laid aside. I will first see my father.

I set seriously to work, collected every map and road-book in the house, and thoroughly examined them all. Of course, I found Southampton easily enough; but no such place as "Diggleworth" greeted my longing eyes. The conclusion of the Thirty Years' War must have been its utter ruin; or else the convenience afforded by the Southampton docks for the import trade in star and cuttle fish, may have entirely absorbed the commerce in those useful articles.

The very difficulty I encountered in finding this mysterious place encouraged me to persevere. The "something wrong" suspicion deepened and increased. I was unwilling to apply again to Mrs. Balfour, lest it should arouse her suspicion, and lead to the thwarting of a scheme, on which I had half determined, viz. to make a secret expedition to Southampton, and, in person, institute inquiries in the neighbourhood. I calculated that I had money enough for the purpose; and, as to the excuse, I wrote to Ambo Hall, whose home was within a day's journey, and desired him to send me immediately a pressing invitation to pass a few days with him before my departure for the Kikkiwakki river.

The faithful friend responded by return of post; and, Mrs. Balfour making no objection, I was to start on the following day. It chanced, on the preceding evening,

that I had occasion to speak to my stepmother, and, quietly entering her boudoir, found her engaged in writing a letter. I knew in an instant, from the expression of her face, that it was upon an unpleasant and irritating subject. The teeth were closed upon her lower lip, as she frowned, and wrote, and beat her foot with impatience, when, as it seemed, she could not instantly command the expression she required.

An idea seized me that this letter somehow concerned my father. What if it were addressed to those who had charge of him? Here was, at least, a chance of ascertaining if she had rightly described the place of his retreat. Apologising hurriedly for interrupting her, I withdrew; but went no farther than an adjoining room. She invariably sent her letters to the post by the hand of the well-trained Augustus; and, by some lucky accident, I might get a glimpse of their addresses.

In half an hour she rang the bell, and sent for her messenger. Augustus came running in; and presently reappeared, with the letters in his hand. He had left his cap in his room, and I heard him throw the letters on the hall-table, during his momentary absence. Knowing I had but a second or two, I sallied from my ambush, and flew to the table. Several letters lay together in a confused heap, half covering each other I could make out nothing. Augustus's step approached. One more eager look—I caught sight of a direction—

“Ingold Inglis, Esq.
Dipthorpe,
——ampton.”

That was enough. I vanished. Dipthorpe—not Diggleworth—must be the object of my inquiries.

The next morning I started. At two hours' distance, on the road to Hall's, I left the coach; and, taking the railway, arrived in London in the afternoon.

I was always lucky in my fellow-travellers. On this occasion there was in the carriage a very nice old gentleman, in a shovel hat; which, of course, commanded my respect, and would probably have done so, even had not the rather full countenance beneath it beamed with benevolence and good humour. I must say, however, that he was rather tiresome with his Latin, persisting in examining me in that tongue, till I was obliged to affect a desire to sleep.

I told my friend, in the course of our journey, that I had never yet been in London, but, nevertheless, was not desirous of remaining in it—a truth, which shows how deeply my mind was set upon the object of my journey. As I added that I was going to Southampton, the old gentleman recommended me to proceed at once to the terminus, and go down that night. He knew the station-superintendent very well, and would give me a note to him, with directions that would save me all trouble.

We were both rather sleepy before reaching town;

indeed, I had to awaken my clerical friend from a sound slumber, in order to remind him of his promise. He was soon on the alert, wrote what he had mentioned on a half-sheet of paper, addressing it to the superintendent of the other station, then called a cab, gave the driver the necessary directions, told me what to pay, and bade me a kind farewell.

It was now night; although, in the brilliantly-lighted thoroughfares, all was clear as noon; and through such a chaos of sights and sounds as it would be vain to attempt to describe, I was rattled off to my destination, and delivered, with my credentials, to the superintendent. That gentleman, after a keen look at me, and at the signature of the note, presently placed me in a carriage attached to the train then about to depart, and supplied me with a ticket.

The journey seemed long. I was tired enough, but could not get any sound repose; and, awake or dozing, my thoughts dwelt continually on my father. I was rather impatient than anxious. Always I felt inspired with an absolute certainty that I should discover him, and that my coming would be the herald of a favourable change.

It was not yet day when we moved into the terminus. The porter, who helped me to alight, and took my carpet-bag, asked me whither I pleased to go?

I told him, to the hotel—the Dolphin Hotel; for so had my confidant, Hall, advised.

The porter looked at me and scratched his head.

"Dolphin! Don't think there's e'er a Dolphin *here*, young gentleman."

I replied that a friend, who knew the place, had recommended a house so named. It was in the High Street, and *that* led straight down to the sea.

"The sea!" exclaimed the man. "I'm afeard you're still a-dozing, sir. That heliment hasn't been here since Noah's time. Sea!"

"No sea at Southampton!"

"Southampton, sir!"

"Yes, yes, Southampton. Are we not there? Do you mean to tell me this is not Southampton?"

"Well," said the man, drily, "it's somethin' *like* it, but it an't *quite* the ticket. This here's *Northampton*, you see!"

I stood aghast. It was too true. My friend in the shovel-hat had, unintentionally, I am sure, despatched me precisely in the contrary direction to what I desired. That accounted for the keen glance of the superintendent—who clearly did not remember the name of his correspondent—but had, notwithstanding, civilly complied with his directions. I had, unfortunately, never examined the ticket he put into my hand. Hence the mistake.

I was ready to cry with the bitter disappointment. So much for my sanguine presentiments. I never would trust them again! Even had time permitted, I

knew I had not sufficient money to defray the double journey. Dejected and discouraged, I permitted the porter to conduct me where he pleased, which proved to be no farther than to a small hotel close to the station, where, in a comfortable bed, I forgot, in a few minutes, all disappointment and fatigue.

I did not hurry up next morning, for, since travelling to Southampton was out of the question, I had made up my mind to remain for a day at Northampton, in order to arrange my thoughts and plans.

I breakfasted leisurely, and, putting a piece of bread in my pocket, prepared to stroll out a good distance into the country, and pass a long day among the fields and woods. Just as I was setting out, the waiter informed me that, if I preferred riding, there was an excellent quiet pony at my disposal (the property of the landlord), at the small charge of sixpence an hour.

I caught at the proposal, and soon, mounted upon the animal in question, found myself clear of the town. It was a still and beautiful autumn day—near the end of harvest, and as I rode slowly along, the peace and harmony of those ministrations with which nature, as a dear poet of mine says,

Healeth her wandering and distempered child,

communicated themselves somehow to my spirits, and revived my hope and confidence. I knew that my errand was one approved by God and my conscience,

and I began to ride on almost merrily, as if, instead of taking an idle canter, I were passing directly to my object.

About two hours' ride from Northampton, I passed through a little cluster of cottages, scarcely deserving the name of a village, and ascended a hill beyond, when my reverie was broken by an abrupt salutation.

"So! Come at last, my lord? We have waited dinner for you just three weeks. Once for all, will his Imperial Majesty accept our terms, or will he not? The great republic of Burrs and Brambles requires a distinct reply."

The person who had accosted me was standing up behind a low hedge which formed the boundary of some land looking like pleasure-ground, on a level higher than the turnpike road. I could, however, discern the roof and windows of a spacious mansion, some hundred paces distant, surrounded by fine trees. The speaker was a tall, stately-looking man, very neatly and carefully attired, and wearing something red across his breast. He held an eye-glass to his eye, and spoke with the utmost calmness and dignity, extending his hand as he awaited my reply, with a gesture worthy of Demosthenes.

After a moment's hesitation I moved on, the man walking parallel with me. Through a gate I perceived several, perhaps a dozen, other persons moving about the grounds, or sitting on rustic seats beneath the trees. The house was a very handsome one, and had windows

down to the ground, and wide open. Here I came to a halt.

"Well, my lord!" resumed my friend, rather impatiently, "the despatches—the despatches!"

"I say, 'gainst orders, an't it?" said another man, lounging up. "*You* knows best; but I should say 'twas."

"Then, sir, you would speak infernally bad English," replied the other; "and I must request you, in my presence at least, to be more careful of your *î's*."

"My eyes! Never you mind my eyes. Here's the doctor."

My friend slank away like a detected thief; his whole appearance and manner denoting the lowest extremity of terror. The other was about to follow, when he turned, and, touching his hat, said:—

"I hope he didn't startle you, sir. He don't often speak to strangers; and when he do, there's no harm in him."

I assured him I was not in the least alarmed, and inquired who the gentleman might be?

"We call him Mr. Canning, sir," said the man; "that's the name he give himself. He walked into a church near here, one Sunday morning six years ago. He had a hatbox under his arm, and he told the parson he come to resign. He was took care of at the parsonage, when there came a letter, inclosing a cheque for a hundred and fifty pounds, and directing that he should be brought here, looked after, and indulged; and, so long as no questions was asked, the same sum should be

sent every year. We think he belongs to some great family, and might be one of Her Majesty's ministers, only there's none of 'em missing."

"This is a madhouse, then?"

"No, it an't sir," said the man, rather sharply. "This here's a lunatic asylum."

This gay, open, careless-looking mansion, a lunatic asylum! Where were the bolts and bars—the dungeons—whips—strait-waistcoats? No sign of intimidation or restraint, excepting only that which the mention of the "doctor's" name had appeared to exercise over my friend. Oh, if those who assumed authority over my poor father had sought out such a refuge, what happy results, with kind and skilful treatment, might not have been effected! My eyes were filling with tears. I turned my pony away, and retraced my homeward route.

Passing the cottages before mentioned, I inquired of a little boy if the place had any name.

The answer sent the blood to my very forehead.

"Dipthorpe."

"But—but——" I faltered, hardly knowing what I said, "Dipthorpe is near Southampton!"

"Dunno," said the boy: "mebbe. Aniow, I 'low 'tis Dipthorpe. Gimmy apeny?"

I gave him twelve; and then asked who owned the big house yonder, on the hill—the—asylum?

"The maddus, you mean." (There is no pleasing everybody!) "That's Mr. Hingliss's."

I nearly fell from the saddle; but held on, and reco-

vered myself. What a marvellous thing! It seemed, to my perplexed mind, as if heaven itself, overruling my stepmother's misdirection, had, by an apparently simple accident, brought me to the very spot I had so earnestly sought.

I paused a moment to recover myself, then rode back to the asylum. A road, branching from the highway, led me up to a large gate near the house, at which I rang, and inquired for Mr. Inglis. The porter replied that he had ridden to Northampton. Did I come to visit a patient?

I assented, and asked if I might be allowed to see Mr. Balfour.

"No such person here," was the reply.

In my excited state, I was disposed to insist the contrary; but the man, looking down the road, almost immediately added:

"Here's the doctor himself coming, sir; you can speak to him."

Mr. Inglis presently rode up. A little demure-looking man, with a smile so peculiarly disagreeable, that I would rather he had scowled.

"Well, my dear young gentleman, what is your pleasure?" he began, as he dismounted, and gave his horse to a groom who followed.

I stated that my name was Balfour, and that I had come to see my father, who, as I understood, was under treatment there.

"As you *understood*, my dear Master Balfour?

Permit me to ask you, ought you not to have made certain, before undertaking this very filial and delightfully-romantic journey (allow me to shake hands with you), that your excellent but afflicted parent was, indeed, under my care? I am overwhelmed with regret for your disappointment. I, too, had a father!"

As this circumstance did not seem to command either surprise or comment, I was silent.

"I enter fully into your feelings."

("Not those which apply to yourself, I hope," thought I.)

"But come in, I beg; rest yourself a little, and look about."

He conducted me through a suite of rooms, quite magnificently furnished. A fine library—a billiard-room—two drawing-rooms—in one of which was a piano, open, with a harp beside it. There was a table set out with fruit and wine, ready, as it appeared, for all comers; and the windows of all these apartments opened to the ground, and gave egress to a beautiful lawn, broad gravel-walks, shrubberies, &c.

"Walk about wherever you please, I beg of you," said Mr. Inglis. "No secrets here; no mysteries with me. This isn't the Inquisition, I take it. No resemblance to Udolpho, eh? Not a shadow of coercion for *my* patients. Gentleness, indulgence, all the freedom in the world, except that they don't get out,—that's *my* system. Throw the rein on the neck. Let the startled

intelligence have its fling. It will come to. Excuse me for a moment, my young friend. I will be with you again before you have time to admire my roses yonder."

I passed through the window to which he pointed, and found some flower-beds, very tastefully arranged. The roses, however, were with the departed summer! The patients were still sauntering about, in twos and threes. Not wishing to encounter them, I entered a side-walk, shaded by acacias, and had passed down it, out of sight of the house, when the bushes opened, and my friend, Mr. Canning, stood beside me!

"And how, my dear lord, is our Imperial friend? You delivered my private message? Good. What did he say? Come this way," he added, drawing me into another side-path; for we had moved on to an open space, and Mr. Canning had caught sight of the keeper strolling quietly in our direction, and affecting not to see us. "You see that man? He's a spy of Austria Now, tell me, did his Imperial Highness appear to recognise the importance of the service I proposed to render? Can he be blind to the merits of an individual who can multiply nineteen million four hundred thousand eight hundred and ninety-three pounds, sixteen shillings, and ten pence farthing, by two hundred and seventy-five and a quarter, and tell you the product in two seconds and a half?"

"Does somebody do that, sir?"

"Why, you know that *he* does—my arithmetician—my statistician—my multitude of Cockers rolled into one—my man, that knows and calculates everything, by merely looking at his fingers' ends. What, my lord, was your mission, let me ask?" concluded Mr. Canning, sternly, as he halted, and drew himself up.

I muttered that, if my instructions had been somewhat more precise, my powers ampler, I might have, possibly—hem—ahem——

"Your lordship's instructions more *precise*!" replied Mr. Canning, with increased dignity. "You were to offer him the services of my arithmetician. Your powers ampler! You were to pull his nose if he refused him. It is *thus* we deal with despots. You were directed, I repeat, both orally and by despatches, to offer to his Imperial Highness the services of my arithmetician, Philippos Balfourios What is the matter, my lord?"

I signed to him to proceed.

"On the sole condition that he should annex the provinces of the North Pole as soon as discovered, and grant the same in perpetuity to the heirs male of myself—George Canning—lawfully begotten."

I could scarcely command myself sufficiently to deal with the poor man, in the only fashion he was likely to comprehend. My heart was bursting with impatience to hear more.

After a moment's cogitation I told him that I now

remembered everything—that his instructions had been rigidly carried out, and his proposals acceded to. One sole difficulty, however, still presented itself to the Imperial mind, viz. whether the faculties of the renowned calculator were in their full vigour.

“More brilliant, my lord, than I ever knew them,” replied Mr. Canning, enthusiastically. “I find it impossible to confuse him. I will give you an instance. Immediately before I promoted him to his present important office, I, just to test him, proposed to him this problem. Listen.”

He selected a paper from many other similar scraps, secured in a large brown pocket-book, and read as follows:—

‘Hetty told her brother George that her maternal grandfather had bequeathed to her just six times as much as their cousin Simeon would have had, if his legacy had exceeded George’s by twice the amount of hers. *How much had Hetty?*’”

“And could my—could the gentleman do that sum, sir?” I asked, breathless with agitation. Had he said *yes*, the mind was surely gone.

“He could not, sir,” replied Mr. Canning, severely. “I did not affirm that he could. This was his sagacious reply,—‘That Hetty was a humbug; and he didn’t believe that the aged relative referred to left any one of the party a farthing.’”

Absurd as this conversation may appear, to *me* it

was fraught with the intensest interest. Notwithstanding the mental condition of my interlocutor, I felt assured he was speaking the truth, and, that being so, it was clear that my father's intellect was mercifully restored.

As my friend seemed inclined to go on, I did not interrupt him.

"My lord," he continued, "I tested this marvellous mind yet farther. I gave him this simple question, easily calculable,—and mark the result.

'A, being in extreme difficulty, gives a bill for one hundred pounds, at sixty-five per cent, payable in six months. B, the holder of the bill, discounts it at the end of three months for four and a-half per cent, and receives one hundred and eight pounds. How much less does he get than his due?

'*Seven years' transportation!*' was this extraordinary man's reply. 'The rascal! Sixty-five per cent! and to a man in difficulty! No, let it be *fourteen!*'"

"And where, sir?" I asked, tremblingly, "is the great man *now*? You mentioned, I think, that you had appointed him to—to the——"

"You are strangely forgetful, my lord!" replied Mr. Canning. "The circumstances occurred before your departure. They were these:—The doctor (the friend with whom I am for the present residing, on account of a chronic rheumatism in my toe) chanced to overhear the answers I have quoted to your lordship. Struck with the profound wisdom of those replies, he

suggested, in my ear, that a gentleman of such attainments deserved the highest advancement it was in my power to confer. Sir, I appointed him, on the spot, Chancellor of the Cellarage, and, under the guidance of two gentlemen of the department, he entered at once upon the functions of his office. It is true he made no small resistance, even threatening an appeal to the law to protect him from what he appeared to consider a reward above his merits; but we ultimately overcame these commendable scruples, and after a playful contest, in which," concluded Mr. Canning, with a pleasant smile, "we all exerted our physical strength to the utmost, our gifted friend was inducted into his official residence. Since that I have not seen him . . . But yonder is the doctor. He does not like to see me walking—I'll be off!"

And Mr. Canning, whose quick eye had discerned the doctor at a distance, apparently looking for me, vanished, in rather an unstatesman-like manner, into the nearest shrubbery.

My head was in a whirl. I knew not what to do. Had Mr. Inglis—in spite of his alleged system of indulgence—really acted as this madman stated? My father recovering, and, nevertheless, subjected to brutal violence!

I was too inexperienced in the ways of the world to be able to fix upon the proper mode of dealing with this difficulty. I could think of nothing but simply to ask

Inglis if he meant me distinctly to understand that he knew nothing of my father.

"My good young gentleman," was his reply, "you must really draw your own conclusions from words which, I should have imagined, admit of but one. It is not my custom to add to my remarks assurances that I am speaking the truth. If every amiable youth who had had the misfortune to miss his papa were to apply to me, I must increase my staff of porters and—(let me call your attention to my pelargoniums)—and secretaries very considerably. I give you my honour, I—— (Some passable azalias here. My gardener won't forgive you, if you leave them unnoticed.) I——"

"But sir——"

"Here we are at the gate. Pony ready? Let me hold your stirrup. Ha! I see you've been on horseback before. So. Farewell, my boy! Great pleasure in your visit. Come again, will you?"

He had positively bowed me out. Upon the whole I was rather grateful for it. If any confirmation of my suspicions had been wanting, his manner supplied it. I was now convinced that, in spite of the man's bragging about the openness of his practice, the freedom of his system, and such-like trash, he had laid his wicked and violent hands upon my poor father, treacherously enlisting the muddled wits of Mr. Canning on his side, and that he held him, at that moment, under a restraint doubly inhuman when exercised towards an intellect on the verge of restoration.

But now, what was to be my course? I revolved a hundred schemes, more or less impracticable, but abandoned them all, and, before I reached the hotel, had determined to set off on the succeeding day for the residence of my schoolfellow, Hall, and consult him as to the expediency of taking his father and mother into our confidence. Colonel Hall, however, I knew to be a cold, retiring man, and I entertained so much doubt whether he might be induced to interpose at all in the matter, that when I arose in the morning, after a very disturbed night, my spirits were infinitely lower than on the preceding day. Nor were they improved by my discovering that it was past ten o'clock (I had not slept till four), and that I had consequently missed the morning train.

I took care to be in time for that at midday; and, having taken my ticket, was strolling about the platform, deep in meditation, when the train from London rolled in, and a rush of passengers recalled me to myself Suddenly a long white hand was laid on my shoulder, and a familiar voice pronounced my name. I looked up.

Old Styles!

I coloured with delight, which he mistook for embarrassment, for he asked me rather gravely if I was playing truant, or had leave to be so far from home.

I told him I was there on business.

"Business, my boy? May I inquire its nature? Or is it connected with your family—matter with which I have no concern?"

More quickly than I ever spoke before — for I dreaded every instant the arrival of the train that would separate me from my kind old friend — I told him the object and the particulars of my expedition, and entreated him to lend me his counsel and assistance.

“Counsel I may be able to give without much difficulty,” said the good old man. “To assist you will be a matter of more delicacy. See, my boy. I am come down on a visit to an old pupil, Captain Vivian, who resides some few miles distant, and who promised to meet me here this morning. You shall postpone your departure at all events for to-day, and we will discuss the matter with Vivian.”

My heart was light as a feather as I walked back to the hotel with Old Styles. Hardly had we entered the house when up dashed Captain Vivian in his phaeton; and presently hurrying up-stairs, welcomed his old preceptor with delight hardly inferior to my own.

After a few moments' conversation, Old Styles introduced me to the notice of his friend, and clearly and concisely explained my position and difficulty.

Captain Vivian looked rather grave.

My old master inquired what kind of character Mr. Inglis bore in the neighbourhood.

“I can say nothing in his disfavour,” replied Vivian; “and I'm glad I cannot. The inveterate dislike I have to the man might otherwise prejudice my statements. . . . There certainly is no apparent concealment about his

establishment. Anybody who pleases may march in and out—inspect the mansion—question the keepers—and hold intercourse with the patients, such of them at least as are not dangerous.”

“And who judges of the danger? Has no medical man but himself access to the place?”

“None that I am aware of. He is entirely free and uncontrolled, excepting always by the Commissioners, to whom he gives a breakfast occasionally; who thereupon inspect his gardens and galleries, his kitchen, and his patients; and, with a high encomium on his humane, liberal, and enlightened system, bid him good morning.”

“Do they see every case? Is nothing concealed?”

“I conclude, nothing. No gentlemen execute a public duty more faithfully and impartially than those we speak of. Still, if no suspicion be aroused—if no hint be given—I cannot say that deception may not be successfully practised, even upon *them*.”

“I believe that in this case such deception has been practised. So thoroughly am I convinced that this boy’s father has been subjected to—to use the mildest terms—a very needless and injudicious coercion, that I must request your good offices to assist us in ascertaining the truth.”

“Most willingly, my dear friend,” said Captain Vivian. “But what can I do? I am a magistrate, it is true; but I fear my authority can hardly ——”

He paused, as if reflecting, while Old Styles paced the room impatiently, his whole heart in the matter.

"We can do something by stratagem," resumed Captain Vivian. "An idea occurs to me. The friends of this Mr. Canning are unknown. If you do not object for the moment to appear in that character, I will accompany and introduce you. We may obtain some reliable information, even from the eccentric source to which I allude. Come, I think I see the way."

After a little more consultation this plan was resolved upon, and we all started for Diphthorpe in Captain Vivian's phaeton. An hour and a half brought us to our destination. At the turn leading to the house I jumped down (as had been previously agreed upon); but my anxiety would not suffer me to remain so distant from the scene of action, and, stealing up close to the gate, I waited eagerly for the result. Presently, loud voices—— But I had better follow the fortunes of the party within.

The porter, who knew Captain Vivian by sight, respectfully admitted and ushered them into the nearest morning-room, where they were presently joined by Mr. Inglis. Stating their desire to have an audience of Mr. Canning, that illustrious statesman was speedily forthcoming. He proved, however, more than usually taciturn. Awed, perhaps, by the presence of the terrible "doctor," he could scarcely be induced to utter a word.

After a few trivial questions, Mr. Styles, as though

by way of testing him, adroitly turned the conversation to the subject of arithmetic.

Poor Mr. Canning immediately pricked up his ears, regained all his courage, and, turning to Mr. Inglis, inquired when he might be allowed to visit his friend Balfour, to whom he had important tidings to communicate.

Inglis frowned, and was about to check him, when Mr. Styles broke in:—

“Balfour! Have you then a gentleman of that name under your care, sir?”

“I need hardly remind you, sir,” replied Mr. Inglis, “that the ideas of these poor visitors of mine are often sadly entangled, and I have observed that they are seldom so completely at fault as with regard to names. *This* unfortunate person,” he added, in an under-tone, “is especially liable to self-delusions of the kind.”

Styles replied that he thought it very probable, and indeed would rather, with permission, question the poor gentleman further, if only for the purpose of seeing how far his singular hallucination would go.

Mr. Inglis evinced a very decided disinclination to this experiment, but as Mr. Styles politely persisted, and Mr. Canning, his tongue once loosed, plunged heartily into the subject, and began to describe in glowing terms the struggle he had related to me, Mr. Inglis deemed it better to fence no longer.

“I have certainly,” he said, “a person whose name

somewhat resembles Balfour, undergoing treatment—but, excuse me, sir—I am really at a loss to know what title you have to inquire——”

“I have no wish to offend you, sir,” said Old Styles. “The chief characteristic of your administration is well known to be its openness; and as you have frequently expressed your desire that strangers as well as friends should visit and inspect your establishment, you can have no objection to afford me an immediate interview with the unfortunate gentleman we speak of, in whom I am really not without a personal interest.”

“Sir, his condition is one that demands the strictest seclusion. I—I cannot hear of it.”

“Permit me, at all events, to ask what manner of accommodation is allotted him? In what part of the mansion, for example, is he lodged?”

“In the cellar! In the cellar!” shouted Mr. Canning.

“In *what?*” said Captain Vivian.

“In the cellar,” repeated Mr. Canning, emphatically. “It’s black, and dark, and chill. The doctor himself told me so to-day, when he said I should be shut up in a place like it if I talked so much to strangers, as he called them. It’s not a fit office for my arithmetician; and I didn’t know they were taking him there, or I would not have helped. I can show it to you. Come.”

And before Inglis could stop him he suddenly walked from the room. Styles and Captain Vivian made a

movement to follow ; but Inglis, pale with rage, planted himself in their way.

"What insolent intrusion is this?" he exclaimed.

"Stand back, gentlemen; this house is mine—and——"

"Hark! He's crying out! '*Help! help!*' Don't you hear him?" exclaimed the voice of Mr. Canning, outside.

A faint call was just distinguishable.

"Let me pass, sir. By Jove, I will go!" cried Captain Vivian.

"Will you?" shrieked Inglis, mad with passion, as he snatched from his pocket a small revolver. It was the worst thing he ever did.

"Will you fire upon us, fellow?" cried Vivian, whose blood was up at sight of the pistol; and with the bound of a panther he threw himself upon Inglis, and, wresting the weapon from his hand, flung him half way across the room. Then, guided by Mr. Canning, they rushed along the passage, and descended a dark and winding staircase. Then they paused and listened.

"Help—help a sane imprisoned man!" cried a faint, eager voice.

In an instant they were at a door secured with heavy bolts and a large iron bar. Back flew the bolts—down clattering went the bar. There stood my dear father—pale, disfigured, neglected, indeed, but neither sick nor emaciated; and, above all, thanks to a merciful and gracious Providence, in full possession of his faculties.

He paused for a moment, looking at his two deliverers, strangers to him—(Mr. Canning had craftily withdrawn before the opening of the door)—then, stepping forward with perfect self-possession, thanked them for their timely interposition, and entreated them to believe that they had released one, in all respects, as fit for freedom as themselves.

In another minute I was in his arms.

It seems strange; but, before we left the house, Mr. Inglis met us, all smiles, and requested a short interview in the library. Here he entered into certain explanations; concluding by producing a packet of letters, containing the instructions under which he said he had acted. If the matter were allowed to drop, he had no objection to hand over these letters to my father. Captain Vivian, aware that he had used somewhat more violence than was absolutely necessary, (for the revolver was innocent of powder and ball,) assumed the part of mediator, and peace was declared. My father took the letters with a frown and a shudder.

After that we left the house together.

One day—one happy day, we passed at Captain Vivian's. Then, taking a final leave of dear Old Styles, my governor and I travelled homewards in company. How bright and cheerful he was! and how fondly, and (my vanity whispered) proudly, he looked at me, as I sat at his side, clasping his hand. Now and then, indeed, a dark shadow would come across his face, and he

pressed his hand to his bosom as though he felt pain. At last, in one of these paroxysms, he tore out suddenly the source of his uneasiness, in the form of a packet of letters. These he divided into the minutest particles, and scattered along the road. After that, he never frowned or looked sad again.

We did not go home that night, but slept at a town some miles distant, whence my father despatched a note of two lines.

The next day, when we reached L——, Mrs. Balfour and Augustus had departed—gone, as the servants said, to a watering-place, for the winter. I have never seen either since.

I did not, as you see, fulfil my excellent stepmother's probable desire—that of leaving my bones among the Kikkiwakkis. To say truth, I forgot all about them.

Six happy months I enjoyed with my dear father; then his health began to decline, and failed at last so rapidly, that I had scarcely begun to school my mind to his probable loss, when I was called upon to mourn it.

But, before he died, we enjoyed many pleasant and familiar conversations, the purport of which will never be effaced from my mind. I keep these recollections apart, in a place by themselves.

One of his favourite topics of discourse was my sweet mother. He was never tired of that loving theme—but would pass hours in listening to my nursery narratives, and himself bearing testimony to her gentle,

truthful, patient nature. It was a strange love that thus bore its first real fruit when its root was in the grave!

A few days before the end, he had had my darling mother's picture brought from the drawing-room, and hung opposite his bed. There—as long as the sense of sight remained—he would gaze upon the soft angelic features till his own almost acquired a portion of their sweetness and repose. Yes, even when the spirit had passed over the “dreadful sea,” the gaze and smile remained.

Perhaps the souls had met, and understood each other.

The dearest friend now left me in the world is “Old Styles.”

THE END.







